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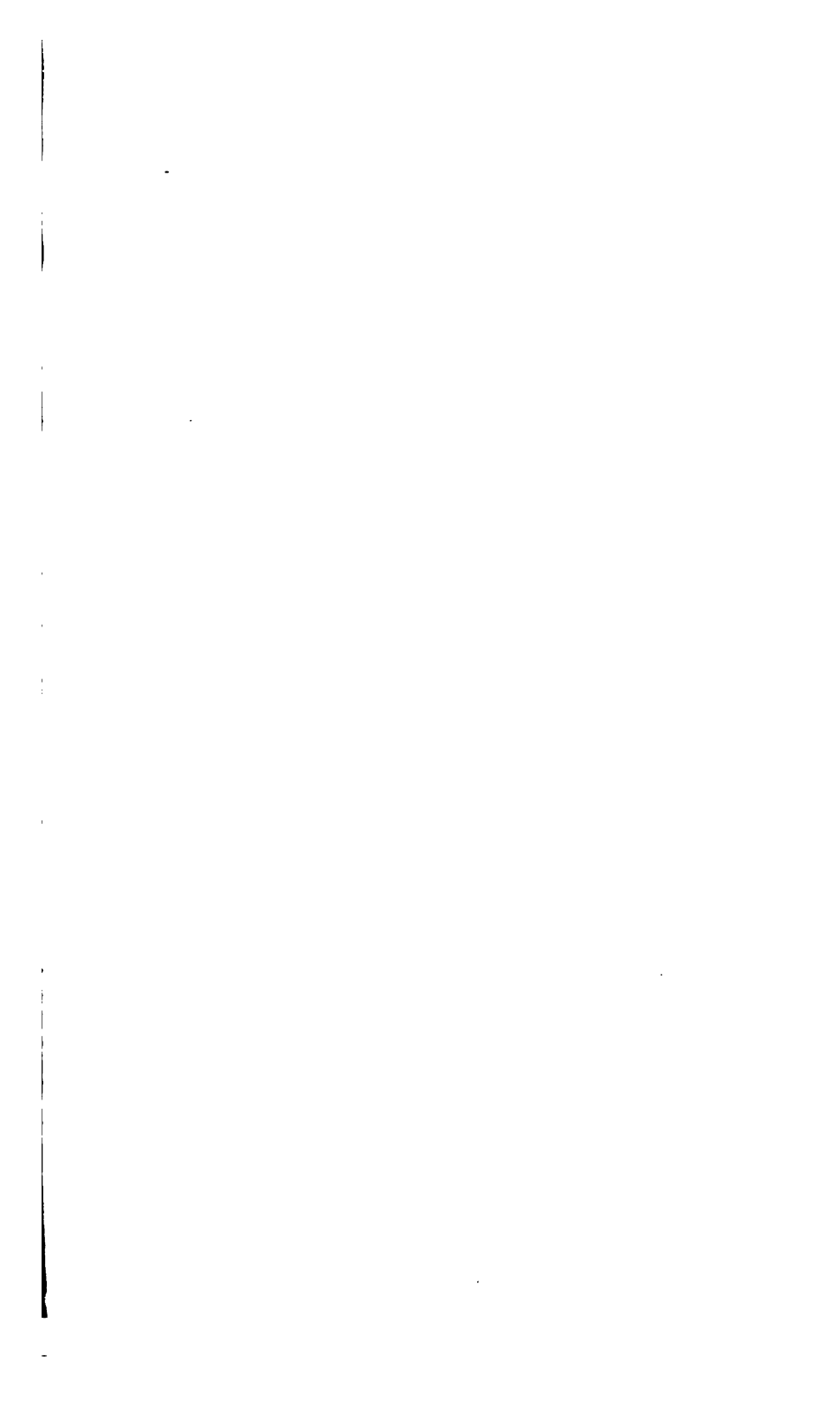
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A
VIEW OF NATURE,
IN LETTERS
TO A TRAVELLER AMONG THE ALPS.
WITH
REFLECTIONS
ON
ATHEISTICAL PHILOSOPHY,

NOW EXEMPLIFIED IN
FRANCE,
By RICHARD JOSEPH SULLIVAN, Esq.
F.R.S. AND F.A.S.

*Mala enim, et impia consuetudo est contra Deos disputandi, sive ex
animo id fit, sive simulate.*

CICERO.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. V.

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LETTERS
TO A
TRAVELLER
AMONG THE ALPS.

LETTER LXXVI.

FROM the southern we are now to bend our way to the northern part of Britain: and though our stay there can be but short, as we must necessarily pass into Ireland, yet am I almost deterred from the undertaking, when I reflect on the doughty champions, who have on either side thrown the gauntlet, and who, with all the pride and spirit of ancestry, are ready to devour any one who shall differ from them in opinion. I am unfortunately, however, too far advanced to relinquish the pursuit. The consideration of our subject has carried me beyond the possibility of retractation; and what is still worse, if we do

dominion. They governed part of Caledonia. These Picts were the first people who checked the career of the Roman eagle, even so far as to oblige the Romans to build works of defence, against the recoil of northern valour. * “The German Scythians, who peopled Scandinavia,” observes Pinkerton, “were the Peukini and Sitones, two divisions of the Basternæ; and called so, probably, from the island of Πευκη in the Euxine Sea, at the mouth of the Danube, whence they proceeded; an island finely described by Appollonius Rhodius, in his poem of Argonautics, written about two hundred and fifty years before Christ. From these came the Picts or Caledonians of Scotland. The Oceanus Deucaledonius is made, by Ptolemy, an extension of the Baltic, or Sarmaticus, *Δευκαλιδωνικὴ τε καὶ Σαρματικὴ* ;” and he expressly says, it was on the north, *ἀπὸ τοῦ βορρᾶς*, of Britain. Caledonians, however, are in another manner derived from Cael-don, the “Gauls of the Hills,” who are possessed of the more mountainous division of Great Britain. †

The Britons, as was a common practice among the Celts, painted their bodies with different colours. They likewise, as is done by the people

• Pownall.

† Macpherson.

ple of the South Sea Islands at this hour, engraved by punctures on their skins the figures of various animals. This probably gained them, says a great man, the name of Britten or Briton. * And hence, what Martial calls the people of Britain, *Picti Britannii*. From the same reason, it is said, the Romans gave the Scots the appellation of Picts. The Latin word at least warrants the conjecture. † These strange and painful ornaments, however, served to express political distinctions, and the nobility of families. Slaves were not permitted to paint their bodies. Inferior people, though born free, were still confined to little marks. The great alone had the privilege of lacerating their whole frames; and hence, face, body, hands, arms, legs, and feet, were all tattooed in the boldest and most animated style. As civilization, however, increased, this practice, with the consequent nakedness of the human figure, fell into disuse. Men began to clothe themselves; but still anxious for blazoned superiority, they transferred to shields and banners, what they before exhibited on their own bodies.

You will smile at this supposed origin of heraldic glories, and probably with reason. The

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source,

* Leibnitz Glossar.

† Pellontier.

source, as relative to other nations, certainly lies deeper in antiquity. His arms were to the Scythian, the friend of his manhood, when he rejoiced in his strength ; and they attended him in his age, when he wept over his weakness. Of these the shield was the most memorable ; “ and what is worthy of remark,” says a learned writer, * “ the ornaments he bestowed upon it, were in time to produce the art of blazonry, and the occupation of the herald. Coats of arms were to be necessary to distinguish from each other warriors, who were completely cased from head to foot ; *Scuta lectissimis coloribus distinguunt*. † Christianity introduced the sign of the cross ; and vanity, or wisdom, was to multiply devices.” The motto likewise, most probably, came from the *cry d'armes* of the middle ages : or you may, if you please, go farther back even to Gideon ; who, when going against the Midianites, gave the word “ to the Lord and Gideon.” These cries were supposed to incite to valour. *Deus adjuva*, *Deus vult*, were cries during the Crusades. Every banneret, or every knight who had a banner, had a cry peculiar to himself and the troops under his command. Barons had also their cries.

Among

* Stuart.

† Tacitus.

Among the Romans, from the days of Romulus, we read of the clypeus and the scutum. On these they represented symbols of the gallant actions of their ancestors, or of the deeds from which they themselves had derived renown. Hence Virgil, describing the shield of one of the kings against whom Æneas fought, says,

Clypeoque insigne paternum
Centum angues, cinctamque gerit serpentibus hydram.

Appius Claudius introduced the usage of dedicating, and hanging them up in the temples, and other sacred buildings; *Suorum clypeos in sacro vel publico loco privatim dicare primus instituit Appius Claudius*. The loss of the shield, was as infamous as running away. And hence the Lacedæmonian mothers, on presenting their sons with their buckles, on going to battle, had this saying, *aut in his, aut cum his*. And the fathers, likewise, (it being the custom to bear the bodies of the slain on shields)—*aut hunc, aut super hunc*. The old branches of the Scythian stem in Ireland also, we are told, made use of no other arms of distinction in their banners, than a serpent twisted round a weapon.*

“Can the vanquished carry joy? No shield is mine! It is broken on the field. It is when

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foes

* *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis.*

foes fly before them, that fathers rejoice in their sons. But give me that broken shield : those feathers, that are rolled in the wind, place them near to Fillan, that less of his fame may fall. Lay me in that hollow rock. Raise no stone above me, lest one should ask about my fame. I am fallen in the first of my fields, fallen without renown.”* And thus would have spoken a Scandinavian, a Caledonian, and an Hibernian. Nor is it different from the eagerness with which Thetis, the mother of Achilles, is described as flying to Vulcan for arms, that the death of Patroclus might be revenged.

The scene of most of Ossian's poems is laid in Scotland, or on the coast of Ireland ; but whether it be in the one or the other, we perceive no change of manners. They each exhibit exactly the same character ; and such is at the same time that of the Scandinavian. Did not an equal similarity prevail among the Greeks and the Trojans ? Do not we see, it was also the Scottish custom as well as the Grecian, to exchange arms with their guests ; and that those arms were preserved long in the different families, as monuments of the friendship which subsisted between their ancestors ?

Men

Men of extraordinary talents, however, and of uncommon learning, have looked at the Caledonian story, through different mediums. Most indeed, of later days, and natives of that part of Britain, have, pardonably perhaps, leaned to a system, which gives them a high degree of antiquity, and a reputation, whatever be their genealogy, which certainly they eminently deserve. But let me be pardoned for asking, of what advantage to their national fame can fanciful interpretations be, when in opposition to historical evidence? Or is arbitrary and bold assertion to banish every species of tradition, and every fact in annals, looked upon for ages as sanctioned by the suffrage of antiquity? As Celts, the Scots are as old as the oldest people of Europe; and that is enough, one would think, for family pretension. But is it seriously to be believed, that the most northern and ungenial part of Britain should spontaneously have shot into perfection, while the more southern and commercial were centuries, even after their first connection with the Phœnicians, before they could rub off the rust of their native barbarity? The whole compass of the earth, as we have had repeatedly occasion to observe, has had its dark, previous to its enlightened side; and the dawn of improvement,

provement has always proceeded from foreign intercourse and colonization.

“Ancient historians,” says Whitaker, “speak of Ireland as the mother of the Scots ; and Caledonia as the parent of the Picts. But this the Scots disdain to admit. From a littleness of soul, they violently oppose the current of history ; the Ireland of the Romans is to be interpreted into the present Scotland ; and the Scotch are to be made the Aborigines of Caledonia.” This is severe language. No prejudices which merely turn upon questions of antiquity, and after all, are perhaps unfairly supposed, can deserve fulminating anathemas. Nothing injures even a good cause so much, as the assumption of infallibility in points wherein the best and wisest have disagreed. It is too dictatorial for a genius as respectable even as Mr. Whitaker’s, to look down with the insolent superiority of contemptuous pity, on those who have been led into opposite conclusions. That argument he well knows, is always liable to the greatest suspicion, which is obtruded with dogmatical sufficiency and petulance.

“Were it certain, or even highly probable,” says Dr. Macpherson, that the British Scots,

owe their name and existence to the ancient Irish, it is difficult to say, why they should be ashamed of their origin. The Germans, South-Britons, and Caledonians, were, before the birth of Christ, nations nearly of the same character with the Hibernians, equally illiterate, equally unpolished, and equally barbarous. Nor was it until the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries that religion and learning flourished to such a degree in Ireland, that it was then commonly stiled the mother country of saints, and reputed the kingdom of arts and sciences. The Saxons and Angles sent thither many of their princes, to have the benefit of a pious and liberal education. It ought likewise to be acknowledged, that some of the most eminent teachers of North Britain received their instruction at the Irish seminaries of literature and religion." *

No candour, certainly, can be more strongly marked than this. The reverend author was willing to subscribe to what was advanced in the legendary tales, or history of the Irish, provided his reason could be convinced he was right in so doing. But this was not the case; and he of course wedded himself to another hypothesis. The elegant translator of Ossian likewise says,
in

* Dr. Macpherson.

in collateral proof, that the dialect of the Celtic tongue, spoken in the north of Scotland, is much more pure, more agreeable to its mother language, and more abounding with primitives, than that now spoken, or even than that which has been written for some centuries back, among the most unmixed of the Irish nation. "A Scotchman," says he, "tolerably conversant in his own language, understands an Irish composition, from that derivative analogy, which it has to the Galic of North Britain. An Irishman, on the other hand, without the aid of study, can never understand a composition in the Galic tongue. This affords a proof, that the Scotch Galic is the most original, and consequently the language of *a more ancient and unmixed people*.

From two such authorities, it would certainly be presumption in me to dissent, were I upheld alone by my own judgment. But much auxiliary assistance is at hand; and to that I must apply for the elucidation, if not for the stability, of the system which appears to me to be best supported by argument. At the period of research and improvement, indeed, at which history is now arrived, it is impossible to make any observations, which may not have been touched
upon

upon by others, Does Horace give us many precepts, a philologist would ask, which we do not find in Aristotle? Though my abilities may not be equal to literary contention, I cannot reconcile myself to the obscurity of mere vegetation. In the lofty oak we see the pride of the forest, and the glory of the land; but the lowest shrub, and the smallest blade of grass, has its use.

In aid of the cause, however, (and both sides are equally interested in it) I shall have occasion, and that pretty frequently, to appeal to the Poems of Ossian. They apparently paint with the pencil of truth; and the light they throw upon the subject, you will find to be unusually splendid. Authenticity, I know, has been denied to these poems. They are declared to be of "modern fabrication." Some of the ancient critics, in like manner, contended that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer were fables; and that the several names of heroes, as well as gods, were nothing more than the affections of the mind, in a visible shape and character. But the ancients were not wild enough, to snatch entirely from the old poet the honour of his historical labours. They never doubted the authenticity of his works; nor had they the unaccountable per-

verseness, to suppose Lycurgus the author of them, because he is said to have been the first who collected them from detached fragments. *

Much reliance is, no doubt, to be placed upon the critical judgment of such a man as Johnson. But no sceptical conjecture is to stand in competition with the solemn asseveration of such a writer as Macpherson. Moreover, is the unequalled, and we know in various instances, unfounded pertinacity of an hypochondriacal traveller to the Hebrides, to be admitted in opposition to the testimony of contending nations? The antiquaries of Ireland, and the learned of the Highlands of Scotland, each claim Ossian, the son of Fingal, as their own. They respectively assign him a birth-place; and struggle for him as eagerly as the Greeks did for Homer. Besides, in Ossian there is such a beautiful mixture of simplicity and dignity, and so much life is given to the characters described, that real manners were never represented with a more striking appearance of truth. I am aware, that manners so pure and elevated, in so very early a stage of society, are difficult to be accounted for. But as I do not wish to deal in miracles, I must
be

* Plutarch.

be allowed to think they are not fictitious ; for, on this supposition, the author must have been inspired ; neither can they, according to my ideas, have come within the range of the invention of a savage. Some middle line, therefore, must be found out ; and that is the historical one, which has been adopted.

The Irish and the Scotch, who you will afterwards find to be one and the same people, may be considered as having an undoubted, and an equal claim to these valuable productions. Mr. Macpherson, indeed, would insinuate, that from internal proof, it sufficiently appears, they are not of Irish composition. "The very language," says he, "is so different from the Irish dialect, that it would be as reasonable to think that Milton's Paradise Lost could be written by a Scottish peasant, as to suppose that the poems ascribed to Ossian, were written in Ireland."* And yet Mr. Macpherson himself, in order to ascertain the æra of Ossian, is obliged to turn to the Irish story. "Many passages," says he, "in Ossian's Poems, and in traditions, allude to the wars of the Romans. The epoch of Fingal was in the third century." And this account agrees

* Mr. Macpherson.

agrees exactly with the Irish historians, who place the death of Fingal, the son of Comhal, in the year 283.

Fingal married the daughter of Cormac, king of Ireland. He is even celebrated by the Irish historians for his wisdom in making laws, and his poetical genius. * “Erin of hills of grass! How pleasant are thy vales! Silence is near thy blue streams. The sun is on thy fields. Soft is the sound of the harp in the castle of Selama.” This praise of Ireland, and much more, is often repeated in Ossian. “The light of heaven was in the bosom of Cathmor. His towers rose on the banks of Atha: seven paths led to his halls: seven chiefs stood in the paths, and called the stranger to the feast. But Cathmor dwelt in the wood, to shun the voice of praise. There stand his mossy towers. I have feasted in his halls. I have seen the walls of Balelutha, but they were desolate. The fire had resounded in the halls. But the blast of the desert comes, and howls in the empty court.” †

The times in which Ossian flourished, were evidently enlightened. He describes himself, as
living

* Macpherson.

† Ossian.

living in a sort of classical age, instructed by the memorials of former times; and points at a period of darkness and ignorance, which lay beyond the reach of tradition. "His words came only by halves to our ears; they were dark as the tales of other times, before the light of the song arose." Again, "Who can reach the source of thy race, O Connel? Who recount thy fathers? Thy family grew like an oak on the mountains, which meeteth the wind with its lofty head; but, now it is no more!" Moreover, we find tenderness, and even delicacy of sentiment, greatly predominant over fierceness and barbarity. Kind hearts are melted with the softest feelings, and at the same time are elevated with the lofty ideas of magnanimity, generosity, and true heroism, which the strains of Ossian pourtray. The region, indeed, within which the genius of Ossian exerted itself, was the highest of all, the region of the pathetic and the sublime.*

It is right, I am aware, to be as strongly guarded against credulity as against incredulity. We should neither dwell too long in the dark, nor wander about till we have lost our way in the light. We are apt to carry all systems too

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far;

• Blair.

far; even where we commence with reason, we are not unfrequently extravagantly fond of ending with imagination. Nations, like men, we know, have their infancy; and the few passages of those times, which they retain, are not, perhaps, such as deserve best to be remembered, but, such as, being most proportioned to the age, have made the strongest impressions on the mind. In those nations, that preserve their dominion long, and grow up to manhood, the elegant, as well as the necessary arts and sciences, attain some degree of perfection; and history, that was at first intended only to record the names, or perhaps the general characters of some famous men, and to transmit in gross the remarkable events of certain ages to posterity, is raised to answer another, and a nobler end: but, was not the Prætor of Rome directed by law, *clavum pangere*, as a register of the number of years?

In the infancy of society, men are occupied with the business of the present hour, forgetful of the past, and careless of the future. They possess neither ability, nor inclination, to contemplate their public transactions in the impartial light of history, far less, to treasure up and record them. Their recent victories over
hostile

hostile tribes are celebrated in the artless song, or commemorated by the rude monument.* But, to preserve any regular series of connected events, is a design which they enjoy not the means to execute, nor scarcely the capacity to comprehend. Among people immersed in ignorance, indeed, there sometimes arise men of superior genius, who apply themselves to the investigation of truth, and the improvement of knowledge. And these men may be called the *first missionaries*. Homer's predecessors, as we have seen, were of this stamp. They roamed about, and sing their heroic ballads; and philosophical rhapsodies. Homer followed their example, and the radiance of truth beamed wherever he appeared.

The traditionary songs and tales of Gaul and Britain, are now almost lost, or may be supposed greatly corrupted by the revolutions and migrations, which were so frequent and universal, that scarcely any kingdom in Europe is now possessed of its original inhabitants. If traditions, therefore, can be depended upon, it certainly must be among a people where there has been the least intermixture with a variety of foreigners: and such were undoubt-

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edly

* Tacitus.

edly the northern parts of Britain and Ireland. The difficulties the Romans had to encounter, and the little lasting impression they made upon the Caledonians, I have already mentioned. The Irish, again, were still more singularly situated. Ireland, so far from being conquered, was never invaded by the Romans. It likewise, in a great measure, seems to have escaped the fury of the Saxons, Danes, and other Northern invaders, who never penetrated into the country, but only committed occasional depredations on their coasts. Thus, while the greatest part of Europe was, for several centuries, thrown into convulsions, Ireland was exposed to little disturbance or commotion from any foreign enemy.*

Both Scotland and Ireland, however, we shall find to have had certain communications with strangers. The songs of the Irish bards, are by some conceived to be strongly marked with the traces of Scaldic imagination. In the poems of Ossian, notwithstanding the difference between the Gothic and the Celtic rituals, are contained visible vestiges of Scandinavian superstition, in the allusions to spirits, who preside over the different parts, and direct the various operations
of

* Prof. Millar.

of nature. But, there are in Ossian, numberless marks of Gothic customs and superstitions: for example, the fashion of making the sepulchres of their chiefs with circles of stone; and, in particular, the illustrious character given of the female sex, in almost every page.

In the year of Christ 208, Severus ordered an army into Caledonia, not to subdue, but to extirpate the natives. This invasion of Severus is, with great probability, says Gibbon, supposed to be connected with the most shining period of the British history, or fable. Fingal is said to have commanded the Caledonians at that memorable juncture, to have eluded the power of Severus, and to have obtained a signal victory on the banks of the Carun, in which the "son of the king of the world," Caracul, fled from his arms, along the fields of his pride. Something of a doubtful mist, indeed, says the historian, hangs over these highland traditions. But, if we could with safety indulge the pleasing supposition, that Fingal lived, and that Ossian sang, the striking contrast of the situation and manners of the contending nations might amuse a philosophic mind. The parallel would be little to the advantage of the more civilized

people, if we compared the unrelenting revenge of Severus, with the generous clemency of Fingal; the timid, and brutal cruelty of Caracalla, with the bravery, the tenderness, the elegant genius of Ossian; the mercenary chiefs, who, from motives of interest, served under the Imperial standard, with the free-born warriors who started to arms, at the voice of the king of Morven; if, in a word, we contemplated the untutored Caledonians, glowing with the warm virtues of nature, and the degenerate Romans, polluted with the mean vices of wealth and slavery.*

A few pages more, will shew you, that this pleasing supposition may be indulged.

* Decline and Fall of Rom. Emp.

LET-

LETTER LXXVII.

TO the Caledonian Britons, says Mr. Macpherson, we must look for the genuine origin of the Irish. Their name of *Gaël*, their language, the conformity of their manners and customs with those of the old Britons, all concur in proving, beyond the possibility of reply, that the Irish are the *posterity* of the *Gaël*, who, after having traversed the island of Great Britain, passed over, in a very early period, into Ireland, from the promontories of Galloway and Cantire. The indigenous appellation of *Gaël* for the Irish, serves strongly to evince them, what history demonstrates them to be, the descendants of the Britons.

This knotty point, which has for a century and a half engaged two nations of contending antiquaries in war, is thus in an instant determined; and the Irish, unless they would continue in the obstinacy of parricides, are enjoined

to a silent submission to this the decree of their parents, the Caledonians of the north. There are no tribes upon earth, I readily acknowledge, to whom it would be a greater honour for the Irish to be allied. But, really to give people fathers and mothers, whether they will or no; and to oblige them to acknowledge a line of relationship, which is, in every link, contradicted by the good old stories of their own family; is more than can be expected even from good-nature itself. Moreover, the Irish are tossed about in such different directions by contending authorities, that it is not to be wondered at, if they hold to their altars with tenacity, and battle with vigour for some of the *Penates* of their ancestors.

The Scots insist upon it, that the Irish are their children; the Southern Britons claim them again, as more immediately their descendants. Thus, we read that about 350 years before Christ, the Belgæ crossed the channel into Britain, and seized the whole extended line from Kent into Devonshire. Numbers of the former inhabitants, who had gradually retired before the enemy, were under the necessity at last to take shipping upon the Western coast,
and

and passed over into the uninhabited isle of Ireland. And these were afterwards joined by another body of Britons, at the great attack upon the neighbouring states by the Belgæ under Divitiacus, who pursued the track of their brethren, and associated with them in Ireland. Thus, the first population began, not by the Northern, but by the Southern Britons; not from the promontories of Caledonia, but from the shores of the channel. The second colony that entered Ireland, was about 100 years before Christ. For two centuries and a half, these colonies were recruited in the same manner. The third and fourth colonies that settled there, were, indeed, it may be supposed, derived through the Mulls of Galloway and Cantire. Ireland, in a word, seems to have been planted with colonies, from the whole range of the Western coast of Britain. The Belgæ of Dorsetshire and Cornwall at one end; the Epi-dii, and Damnii of Caledonia at the other; and almost every nation between, all contributed to the population of Ireland: and the whole circuit of the country was completely peopled about 150 years before Christ.*

* Whitaker.

Ireland has certainly been greatly indebted for this favour; and especially for the animated and brisk manner in which the population of so tolerably extensive a country was carried on. Barely two hundred years, and without super-tation in the first settlers! This was doing marvellously. But, what is to become of poor Milesius and his posterity all this time, who, the Irish chronicles say, invaded the country 1267 years before the Christian æra; or about one thousand years, according to these new systems, before it was inhabited? I am not inclined to an absurd predilection for the fictions of the early periods of the Irish story; neither will I disturb the manes of their giant Partholanus. But, this I cannot refrain from observing, and it is at least worthy of the attention of those who doubt in the gross, that in Ireland, and Ireland alone, we first meet with Celtic history, in Celtic language; and this long before the nation had any acquaintance with the learning of Greece or Rome.

The Milesian story, says Whitaker, concerning the first population of Ireland, and the account of the migration of the Scots from Ireland into Britain, are two incidents that are founded upon very different authorities. The former rests solely upon the credit of writers that

that never existed; and upon the authority of records, that were written some ages before the use of letters was known in Ireland. The latter is grounded upon the authority of writers actually, or nearly, contemporary with the facts; upon histories of the best credit; and upon records of the greatest authenticity. The Irish systems of antiquity, says Dr. Macpherson, were formed after the Holy Scriptures were known in that country; and it is beyond all doubt, that their fictions on that head are engrafted upon names in the Old Testament. All the knowledge now remaining, even of what passed in Ireland before the light of the Gospel began to dawn there, is extremely little.* Tradition, indeed, might, for a time, have preserved a confused shadow of great events. The compositions of bards and *filles*, might have transmitted, through a few generations, some occasional achievements of their heroes; but, nothing is more absurd, than to depend upon either, for the regular and continued history of any nation.†

I will not animadvert upon this incautious assertion of the respectable divine. He ought, however, to have recollected, how widely scepticism

* Sir James Ware.

† Dr. Macpherson.

Acusilaus is condemned by Hellenicus ; that Hellenicus is accused of falsehood by Ephorus ; Ephorus by Timæus ; Timæus by his successors ; and Herodotus by all the world. Josephus brought down his antiquities to the year of Christ 94.

Historical records, indeed, were so scarce, or so defective, in the early part of the Grecian story, that even the most inquisitive, and the best informed writers, were unacquainted with the most remarkable transactions of neighbouring kingdoms, which happened within a century of their own time. Thus Herodotus and Xenophon differ extremely, in the accounts they give of several important circumstances in the history of Cyrus the Great ; though Herodotus was born only 45 years after Cyrus's death, and Xenophon about 34 years after Herodotus. Herodotus says, Cyrus was the son of Cambyses, a Persian of inferior rank : Xenophon, on the contrary, informs us, that Cambyses was king of Persia. Herodotus says, he dethroned Astyages, and assumed the dominion of the Persians : Xenophon says, Astyages died in peace, and left his kingdom to his son Cyaxeres. Herodotus says, he was slain in battle : Xenophon
says

says, he died in his bed, surrounded by his family and friends, and expressed the sentiments of a philosopher. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, I know, is generally regarded as a moral or political romance. But, it may be observed, that the author himself disclaims the idea. He tells us, in the beginning of the work, that he had taken great pains to inform himself of Cyrus's birth, education, and character, and that he would not advance any thing, but what he could depend upon as truth.

The Greeks, speaking of their own country, and its inhabitants, thought it always enough to say, they were *Αὐτοχθῆνες*, or Aborigines. The same latitude, but no more, is, I perceive, taken by the Irish. In their most extravagant legends, the Irish only give themselves the same denomination, and very nearly in the same terms, *Atiab-tuath*.* The transactions, indeed, of the fabulous part of the Irish history, were like the transactions of the fabulous part of the Grecian history, and were probably made out of traditionary Scythiac tales, mangled by time, and exaggerated by ignorance.

* Collect. de Reb. Hib.

The Romans themselves, at first, made no application to letters, or sedentary occupations. Cato is introduced, by Cicero, as saying, it had anciently been the fashion, at Roman feasts, to sing heroic ballads, in honour of their ancestors; and that this custom had been discontinued even no later than in his own time. They had hitherto no historian, poet, or philosopher. Fabius, Ennius, and Cato, were the first historians of their country, and raised the first literary monuments of genius; that were to remain with posterity. The earliest compilations of their history, they owed to Greeks; and in their own first attempts to relate their story, they employed the language of that people.* This was in the sixth century from the foundation of the city, and little more than an hundred years before the birth of Christ. And yet, liberal minded scholars scarcely doubt, whether the early periods of the republic partake of the uncertainty of all other profane history, and labour under the obscurity which hangs universally over the origin of nations.

Tradition is so nearly allied to fable, we are told, that no authentic history can be compiled but from written materials.† Adieu, then, history!

* Dion. Hal.

† Aristotle.

tory ! That of Ireland must be given up as no less visionary than a fairy tale. But, shall we, in like manner, doubt what is said of Balbec and Palmyra, two of the most magnificent remains of ancient magnificence, because they have been neglected in the transmission by written materials ? Or, shall we doubt of the great kingdoms of the Seleucidæ, and of the Ptolemies, because they became part of the dominions of a single city, whose name we in vain look for in history ? Persia knows nothing from record of the unfortunate deeds of the Persians in Greece. The battles of Marathon, Thermopylæ, Salamis, and Platea, are, to the Persians, as fabulous as the ascent of Mohammed is to us ; or the descent of Orpheus was to the uninitiated Greeks.

From about 610 years before Christ, says Mr. Richardson, to the Macedonian conquest, we have the history of the Persians, as given us by the Greeks, and the history of the Persians, as written by themselves. Between these classes of writers we might naturally expect some difference of facts ; but, we should as naturally look for a few great lines, which might mark a similarity of story : yet, from every research which I have had an opportunity

to make, there seems to be nearly as much resemblance between the annals of England and Japan, as between the European and Asiatic relations of the same empire.

The credit of every historian, who treats of events beyond his own knowledge, must rise or fall in proportion to the means of information he has made use of. If he derive it from hearsay, he is certainly read with caution; if he profess to have learned it from the records of the country, whose history he gives, his accounts are generally admitted to be authentic; and it has not been usual to contradict him directly, by flatly denying the existence of any such records in his time. If a foreign writer should differ from him, in the accounts he gives of the same matter, the error is commonly charged rather upon the stranger, than on the native. These are, I conceive, general rules for determining the credit due to all historians and annalists, whether ancient or modern.

But, after all, of what consequence is the question, whence was such a country, for instance, as Ireland, peopled? It is to every one, who is free from national bigotry, perfectly indifferent.

different. I can suppose it to be precisely the same thing to the Irish, whether they be considered as of a Spanish, a Gaulish, or a British stock. When they turn to their annals, however, they may perceive insurmountable obstacles to the entire surrender of what has long been cherished by their fathers, and sanctioned, as they may believe, by fair and unsophisticated historical deduction. Thus, the old writers of Ireland, and the *Psalter of Cashel* in particular, refer to the *more ancient* records of the country, still extant, as they assert, in their times: and why they are not to be judged by the same law as other writers, I profess, I cannot discover. *

I have said, the Britons and the Irish were radically the same, at one period of their history. From Pliny we learn, that Britain was not the peculiar and appropriate name of Albion. It was common to Ireland, and all the islands about it. "Albion ipsi nomen fuit, cum Britanniae vocarentur omnes." It is not, however, so clear to me, that the Romans, as is asserted, were not acquainted with Ireland, though they never visited it.† Tacitus, on the

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* Anon. Exam. of Macpherson.

† Whitaker.

icism might be encouraged to extend itself, upon the ground of such an unqualified doctrine. But, let me be permitted to ask, if the Irish history, blurred, as it unquestionably is, with extravagancy and fable, be not as defensible as the early history of other nations? Before the time of Homer, there was no historian in Greece. The bard, of course, treated historically of past transactions, according as he could be informed by tradition, song, or whatever method was then in use for preserving their memory. For this, we have the consent of antiquity. They appealed to him; they were decided by him; he was preserved as a faithful historian. Nor was all invention, that seems to be feigned, but, rather frequently the obscure traces of real persons and actions.* This also happened to Herodotus, the first professed historian, who is as fabulous as Homer, when he refers to the common reports of countries; and it is not to be imputed to either as a fault, but as a necessity of the times.† Nay, the very passages which cause us, at this distance, to tax them with being fabulous, might be occasioned by their diligence, and a fear of erring, if they too hastily rejected those reports, which had passed current in the nations they described.

An

* Pope.

† Strabo.

An elegant critic, in a late ingenious and learned publication,* observes, that the Greeks had no accurate history before the Olympiads; all their accounts of preceding ages being confused and inconsistent. “Nihil a Græcis ante Olympiades, accuratè scriptum esse.”† Plutarch ventures no farther into Grecian antiquity, than the time of Theseus. This *ne plus ultra* of Plutarch, is not much more than half a century before the siege of Troy; for Theseus is said to have been born 74 years before the siege of Troy, ‡ which was 1184 years before Christ. The Olympic games are supposed to have been first instituted in the fabulous ages of Greece. But, the first Olympiad, which the Greeks used in their chronological computations, was in the year 776 before Christ. “There is nothing but uncertainty and contradiction in the accounts, which historians have given us, even of Lycurgus, the celebrated Spartan lawgiver.”|| Plutarch wrote about 120 years after Christ. Josephus asserts, that the ancient Greek writers destroy one another’s credit; that the genealogies of Hesiod are corrected by Acusilaus; that

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Acu-

* Dis. on Parian Chronicle.

† Justin Martyr.

‡ Newton.

|| Plutarch.

geography, says he, was extreme. They do not even appear to have known the discoveries made in the more ancient voyages, which were certainly not unknown to Homer. In the time of the Peloponesian war, the Lacedæmonians transported their ships by land from one sea to another, and this expedient was common.* What idea are we thus to form of the Grecian marine in that age, about 430 years before Christ, when compared with that of the Carthaginians, who, 590 years before Christ, according to the prophet, supplied Tyre with tin and lead from the British isles?† But, the Pelasgians knew Britain and Ireland, and hence, says an able, though not a Milesian defender of Hibernian tradition, both Etruscan and Pelasgian antiquities are to be explained by a reference to the Irish. Thus, Scylla, in the Etruscan antiquities, is represented as a tall rock in the sea, surrounded by a group of syrens, the guardians of the sea shore. In Irish, *sceile* is a high rock, splintered from the mountain. *Charybdis*, also, in Irish, implies *carb*, a ship, and *deis*, to stop, or impede.‡

* Strabo.

† Ezekiel,

‡ Vallancy.

Nor let us consider a temporary ignorance in the Greeks as any thing strange. National deprivations of knowledge, are as accurately to be traced, as national acquisitions. The dark cloud, which had been cleared by the Phœnician discoveries, and finally dispelled by the arms of Cæsar, again settled on the shores of the Atlantic; and Britain, after its conquest, was again, I had almost said in our own times, lost among the fabulous islands of the ocean. One hundred and fifty years after the reign of Honorius, who died A. D. 423, the gravest historian of his day * describes the wonders of a remote island, whose eastern and western parts are divided by an antique wall, the boundary of life and death. The east is a fair country, inhabited by a civilized people: the air is healthy; the waters are pure and plentiful; and the earth yields her regular and fruitful increase. In the west, beyond the wall, the air is infectious and mortal; the ground is covered with serpents; and this dreary solitude is the region of departed spirits. This island is inhabited by the Frisians, the Angles, and the Britons. †

* Procopius.

† Gibbon.

When the Romans could have, in this manner, lost all memory of a bright and valuable treasure, which they had recently possessed; how merely as a shadow, if even a trace were left, must Ireland have been in the recollection of those former masters of the world! But, to other, and to better sources of information we are now to turn ourselves. Ireland is said to be the *Thule* of the ancients, and for this reason, that it was the first of the British isles, which the Carthaginians could have met with, steering their course northward, when they departed from Cape Finestre, the northern head-land of Spain. And it is contended to be the same with that mentioned by Aristotle, as having been discovered by the Carthaginians. “*Extra Columnas Herculis aiunt in mari a Carthaginensibus insulam fertilem inventam, ut quæ tam sylvarum copia, quam fluminibus navigationi idoneis abundet, cum reliquis fructibus floreat vehementer, distans a continente plurimum dierum itinere,*” &c. The situation of Thule, however, has been much controverted; (this name has been successively given to Thetland, Faro, Orkney, Norway, Lapland, &c.) but, all agree that Thule was some place towards the north, with respect to the first discoverers;

verers; and many, make it to be one of the British isles. Iceland, indeed, has been much insisted upon. But, I cannot conceive how Iceland could have warranted the description of great fertility, and copia sylvarum. Moreover, we are told, the north part of Ireland retains the word *thulab* to this day; signifying the north, or left-hand.*

On so immaterial a point, however, it is not incumbent on us to squander our enquiries. Neither shall I admit, or deny, what a great antiquary has observed, that Ireland was not without reason called of the most profound antiquity. "A profundissimâ enim antiquitatis memoriâ historias suas auspiciantur, adeo ut pro illis omnia omnium gentium antiquitas sit novitas."† The age of Ireland cannot be greater than the age of Britain. If I can but support them as twin sisters, it is all my argument requires: I shall have adopted, I think, the fair line; at least, it will be that which is most to my own satisfaction and belief. But, I must be forgiven for having recourse to my former hypothesis of *colonization*. From colonies, history, which extends, indeed, but to a few moments

* Collect. de Reb. Hib.

† Camden.

ments in the existence of nations, is almost universally deduced. Before the arrival of men who have had science enough to explore distant regions, and expansion of mind sufficient to improve and meliorate other soils as well as their own, the Aborigines are generally found to have neglected every species of historical record. From foreign light, which, in the progress of things, bursts upon the insulated nations of the earth, history is with gratitude to avow her origin.

About eight hundred and ninety years before the Christian æra, a Phœnician colony settled on the coast of Africa. They first emerged into notice in consequence of their opposition to the naval enterprizes of the Asiatic Greeks, who, about the middle of the sixth century before Christ, flying the oppressive dominions of the Persians, threw themselves on the western shores and islands of the Mediterranean. About the time of the invasion of Greece by Xerxes, the Carthaginians were the most powerful commercial nation in the world. Their continental boundaries were extensive. They were masters of Sardinia, and of the Northern coast of Sicily. They had colonies in Corsica, Malta, and

and the Balearian Isles. They often visited the Cassiterides. They had the gold mines of Spain. They traded with Egypt; and, by means of the Red Sea, with Persia and India.* The city of Carthage was founded a hundred years earlier than that of Rome. Her authority was acknowledged by three hundred African cities; † her dominion was filled with monuments of art and magnificence. The country was extremely populous, and it deserved the name of the common granary of mankind.

But, long before Carthage, the immense riches of Sidon were diffused among more remote nations of the world. At the time of the Trojan War, they were celebrated. ‡ Three hundred years before Romulus was taken from the wolf, *Gades*, or Cadiz, was founded from Phœnicia. It is not very wonderful, therefore, that the Romans, on their first landing in Spain, should have found it inhabited by different races of people, by Celts, Iberians, Phœnicians, Persians, and Carthaginians. || Nor is it more extraordinary, that in the fourth century of the

* Pliny.

† Homer.

‡ Strabo.

|| Varro.

Christian æra, several cities of Spain should have been numbered with the most illustrious of the Roman world. Manufactures were improved by the skill of an industrious people; and the advantages of naval stores contributed to support an extensive and profitable trade. The arts and sciences flourished.*

After the Phœnicians, the people of Miletus in Asia Minor, appear to have had the principal share in civilizing European nations. Strabo acquaints us, the Milesians applied themselves very early to navigation. According to Pliny, they sent out above fourscore colonies. Thales was a Milesian, and so was Anaximander, and Anaximenes. Now, why might not the old Irish have been called Milesians, from this enterprizing people, who might possibly have sent a colony into Ireland?† The Phocians, who were also of Asia Minor, we know, founded a colony at Marseilles, at least 600 years before the Christian æra. On what ground of consistency, therefore, is it, we are to believe the one, and deny the other? In the time of Propertius, who lived under Augustus Cæsar,

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* Ausonius, Isidore.

† Dr. Campbell.

It was the received opinion, that the Irish were descended from the Scythians. * The *Scotti* were a colony of the *Scythæ*. The name was the same, with the alteration of one letter only, the *o* for the *y*, owing to a difference of pronunciation. Ireland, it is well known, was the ancient *Scotia*; and that its inhabitants, from the third, down to the fifteenth century, were called *Scots*. What is now called Scotland, was then Caledonia.

The Irish chronicles record, that a colony of Milesians, Spaniards, or a mixture of Spaniards and Carthaginians, emigrated from Spain into Ireland; but, at what period, is not exactly ascertained. Vallancey conjectures it to have been about the time of Asdrubal's defeat in Spain, by Scipio and his brother Cneius, that is, about 216 years before Christ; for at that time, the Carthaginians were not only repulsed in Spain, in Africa, and the Balearic islands, but many of the cantons of Spain threw off the Carthaginian yoke, and submitted to the Roman power. Some of the Irish historians, also, agree in this period. Far be it from me, says a

* Lib. iv. Ec. 3.

late judicious and impartial writer,* to refuse my assent to the tradition, that a Scythian people, coming last from Spain, did settle in Ireland, at a very early period. There is firm ground for persuasion, that a very considerable intercourse did formerly subsist between Spain and Ireland. That the Goths, and other Scythiac nations, had taken possession of different parts of Spain, at different periods, is well authenticated. We are told, even by Orosius, who flourished in the fourth century, that the Scythians expelled from Gallicia, in Spain, by Constantine the Great, took shelter in Ireland, where they found the country already under the dominion of their countrymen, the Scyths, or Scots. The five colonies, the Partholan, the Nemedian, the Firbolgian, the Danan, and the Milesian, which are said to have successively possessed themselves of Ireland, were all Scythians, as the Aborigines are said to have been Celts.

Porphry, a Greek philosopher of the third century, is the first who mentions the name of Scots, and he speaks of them, as of a people *not* living in Britain. Ammianus Marcellinus
says,

* Dr. Campbell.

says, they migrated from Calabria; in Spain, into Ireland, and at length settled in Scotland. That Ireland was the ancient Scotland, was never doubted or denied. But besides, says Dr. Campbell, there is a cloud of authorities to prove, in addition to what I have said, that the Northern rovers, or pirates, from Scythia, particularly from Norway, Sweden, Livonia, the Cimbrian Chersonese, and the adjacent isles, no matter whether you call them Scyths or Scots, Goths, or Danans, or Danes, Ostmen or Normans, had possessed themselves of the most commodious sea ports of Ireland, and had built the principal maritime towns, long before the arrival of St. Patrick in that island. Dublin was built by them, so early as the second century.

The Bearnois, and the people of the lower Navarre, as I have learned from themselves, have traditionary corroborations of their migration into Ireland, the *Land of Pasture*, as it is still called in the Basque language. The emigrations of the Iberians, or Celtiberians, as they were more generally denominated, were indeed so numerous, that there is scarce an
author

author but mentions them.* Pliny even makes them find their way into the East, and there to establish themselves near the river Indus.† But, not to go far from home, you recollect what Seneca, himself a Spaniard, says of the little, and comparatively barren island of Corsica. The Corsicans, says he, still conform to the customs, the manners, and the dress of their original founders, the Iberians. Now, where is the much greater difficulty of a colony making its way to Ireland, than to Corsica; in particular, when we recollect, that the one is fertile, whereas, the other is not so?

An erroneous incapacity has been objected to the vessels of those days, especially to the *curraghs*: for the Britons are expressly declared by Lucan, to have navigated the seas in their curraghs. Succours were sent in curraghs from South Britain into Gaul, in the days of Cæsar. The migration to America was effected in curraghs. The Scots invasion of the Britons, from Ireland and Caledonia, was in curraghs. If, then, there were ships, or sea-boats, which could

* Seneca, Tacitus. Ptolemy. Brouss.
Scaliger. Braun.

† Lib. vi.

could live in the channel between Gaul and Britain, why should there not have been ships, or sea-boats, which could have lived between Spain and Ireland? *Corrack* and *corcor*, in old Irish, signifies a ship, built of strong timbers and planks, and is the same as the Arabic *kair-kar*, or *kurkoor*, a large ship.* “ Rise, ye gentle breezes of Erim. Stretch my sails towards Morz’s shore. The king of Morven commanded. I raised my sails to the wind. Our course was to sea, to Berrathon, the isle of many storms. The bay received our ships. My white sails rose over the waves, and I bounded on the dark blue sea. Often did I turn my ship, but the winds of the east prevailed. The sun rose on the sea, and we beheld a distant fleet.”† Fingal, and his heroes, are represented as making several voyages to Scandinavia.

Yet, Ireland is still accused of remaining superstitiously devoted to her ancient history. She is said, sullenly to turn away from the light of reformation, that is spread over the neighbouring island, and to wrap herself in the gloom of her own legendary tales. *Parcere subjectos,*

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* Vallancy. † Ossian.

et debellare superbos, was an established maxim of the Romans. It is not very becoming, to brand what are supposed legitimate claims with the severity either of invective or opprobrium.

LET.

LETTER LXXVIII.

VENERABLE Bède, who was born in 661, speaks of Ireland, as a rich, and a happy kingdom, undisturbed by those bloody wars, which harrassed the rest of the world, during the barbarous ages: “*Insulæ hujus situs est amœnus, ac diversantium exterarum carens bello nationum.*” And she, of all the Scythiac and Celtic states of ancient Europe, as I have already said, is the only one that has preserved her own chronicles in her own language. With domestic documents, therefore, so strongly in her favour, and those still strengthened by every extrinsic reference, I cannot, in common honesty, reject evidence which speaks conviction to my understanding; nor subscribe, with implicit acquiescence, to the *fiat*, which declares Grecian and Roman writers to be the only standard of historical truth.*

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• Whitaker.

The testimony of Bede, says Dr. Leland, is unquestionable, that, about the middle of the seventh century, many nobles and others of the Anglo-Saxons, retired from their own country into Ireland, either for instruction; or for an opportunity of living in monasteries of stricter discipline; and that the *Scots*, as he stiles the Irish, maintained them, taught them, and furnished them with books at their own immediate cost.* Nor can it, in addition, be impertinent to observe, that if we suppose the old Irish poets to have been the inventors of the whole series of incidents, so circumstantially detailed by them, they still must have drawn their picture from that government, and those manners, which subsisted in their own days, or were remembered by their fathers. Their very fictions are proofs, that some solid foundation of true history lay at the bottom of even their wildest superstructures.

But, there is, says Sir William Petty, no monument, or real argument, that when the Irish were first invaded, they had any stone building, any money, any foreign trade, nor any learning beyond the legend of the saints, psalters, missals, rituals, &c. nor any geometry, astronomy,

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* Hist. Ireland.

anatomy, architecture, engineering, painting, carving, nor any kind of manufactures, nor the least use of navigation, or the art of military. This is a very strange assertion from a man of considerable ability. At the same time, I am far from believing the Pagan Irish to have been, in any great degree, more civilized than the Pagan Britons, or the Pagan Caledonians: nor am I at all inclined to go the whole of the way with the enthusiastic admirers of Hibernian antiquity, who paint with perhaps rather too much vivacity.

Suppose the Ogygian writers, it is asked, could trace up their genealogies to Japhet, and could prove they knew their letters before any nation in Europe, yet, would not Spencer's question always recur, "If such old scholars then, why so unlearned now?" The answer, I should conceive, might be somewhat to this effect. The hand of oppression, and the revolutions of ages, have brought down the Irish into primeval intellectual indigence. Once, at least, we know, Ireland was dignified with the title of *Insula sanctorum & doctorum*; and that, too, centuries before its invasion by the English. But, are we indeed, seriously to be told, that all must have been in ignorance,

because, after the most diligent investigation, no remains are now to be found in Ireland more noble than the *Round Tower*; and none more ancient than the *Carn*, the *Tumulus*, the *Crom-liagh*, and the *Druid Temple*; all dreary monuments of barbarous superstition?

Who that has ever seen Greece, Italy, Egypt, and the countries of Asia, once so accomplished, but now so degenerated, but, unless compelled by the irresistible force of evidence, would doubt of their ancient renown? Who has ever observed the desolate barbarity of Calabria, or reflected on the metamorphosis of Sicily, and can hear, without a mixture of surprize and incredulity, that, five centuries before Christ, those countries contained above twenty warlike communities, several of whom could send into the field an hundred thousand fighting men? All these were the Magna Græcia, which was colonized about the eighth century before Christ. Even the ruins of Carthage have perished, and the place would now be unknown, were it not for the broken arches of an aqueduct, which guide the steps of the inquisitive traveller.*

* Leo. African.

Amid those revolutions, which all nations have experienced, there are few countries which have preserved their property, or their acquisitions, pure and unmixed: How strongly is this verified, for instance, in Egypt! Deprived, three and twenty centuries ago, of her natural proprietors, she has seen her fertile fields successively a prey to the Persians, the Macedonians, the Romans, the Greeks, the Arabs, the Georgians, and at length, to the race of Tartars denominated Ottoman Turks. Syria, as well as Egypt, has undergone similar revolutions. We may trace her distresses from the Assyrians of Nineveh, who, passing the Euphrates about the year 750 before the Christian æra, obtained possession of almost the whole country lying to the north of Judea; next, to the Babylonians; and so on to their present masters, the ravagers from Scythia. But, how grieved, as well as astonished, are we, when we behold the present barbarism and ignorance of the Copts, descended from the profound genius of the Egyptians, and the brilliant imagination of the Greeks; when we reflect, that to the race of negroes, at present our *slaves*, and the objects of unfeeling contempt, we owe many of our arts, and many of our sciences; and when we recollect, that it has even been a problem, whe-

ther the understanding of negroes be of the same species with that of white men! *

The mind which is not totally ignorant of the ordinary course of physical and moral causes, but knows the limits of probability and impossibility, is not to be driven from the standard of truth, by the bold assertions of one writer, nor the wily insinuations of another, Ireland was, at one time, the school of the West, and the quiet habitation of sanctity and learning.† Many, and unequivocal circumstances concur to prove, that during the barbarous ages, when the rest of Europe was involved in turbulent darkness, this sequestered island, enjoying the blessings of peace, was literally the happy and the scientific country, it has been described by Bede. Even Dr. Macpherson is candid enough to confess, that the seminary of monks established by Columba, an Irishman, in the island of Jona, in the sixth age, the year of Christ 565, seems to have been the only one within the territories of the Scots, which could furnish men who could read or write. If they kept any register of transactions, says he, they were destroyed or lost, in the Norwegian conquest of the Hebrides by
Harold

* Volney.

† Dr. Johnson.

Harold Harfager, about the middle of the ninth century. The time in which Bede lived, was certainly the golden age of Ireland. That kind of learning, which then subsisted in the world, flourished greatly in that country.*

Towards the middle ages, indeed, the Irish fell from the respectable rank they were universally allowed to possess. But, if they then precipitated from the character they had for centuries enjoyed, we are to consider, that all nations have had their dark, as well as their shining periods. The domestic confusions of their government, and the cruel oppressions of the Danes, greatly contributed to their national degradation. Even the English invasion, for some ages, radically exterminated every pretension to intellectual improvement. In the year 795, the Ostmen, Normans, or Danes, found their way into Ireland, into France, into England, and into Scotland. Turgesius, the Danish chief, having, in the year 840, subdued Ireland, erected, at proper stations, castles and fortresses; totam undique terram, locis idoneis incastellavit.† And thus, while Ireland lay yet prostrate, and gasping under the fatal wounds received

* Dr. Macpherson.

† Giraldus Cambrensis.

received in a bloody struggle of two hundred years, against the Northern invaders; the English, under Henry II. made their successful inroad, and established themselves in an exhausted and distracted country.

The people, from whom extraordinary blessings, or extraordinary miseries have been derived, are certain at all times to be remembered in the histories of the world. The Phœnicians, and the people of Palestine, thus, are for ever to live in the memory of mankind. The one gave us letters, and the other gave us religion. But, the inhabitants of such an insulated spot as Ireland, have little better to expect, than sullen neglect, or proud forgetfulness. Their little game, has been like the little game of others; and therefore they are to blame to look to a higher scale of importance than is commonly, though reluctantly, given to the reduced and wretched remains of former consideration,

The periods before the introduction of Christianity into Ireland, are those, however, which are held to be peculiarly fabulous. The natives, say Anti-Hibernians, were too barbarous to have the use of letters. But, let me ask,
what

what were the Greeks, when they were found to be in possession of the use of letters? What were they, even ages *after* Cadmus? I have boldly asserted; and, if I am not mistaken, I think I have irrefragably proved, that both Britons and Irish had letters before the æra of Christianity. In the Irish language, there are eighteen letters; their shape not unlike the Greek, but, neither taken from the Latin, nor from the Greek. The small number of their letters, argues the antiquity of their alphabet, and consequently, that they did not borrow from the Romans, as is affirmed by Innes: for, if they had, what should have hindered them from taking their *whole* alphabet, since it may be said, they have all their sounds? As to their having no learning at all, till the Romans came among them, how will the same author, and his implicit followers, reconcile it with what Greek and Latin writers say of their Druids, &c.? Moreover, if the Irish had borrowed their letters from the Greeks or Romans, what could have been the reason why they did not borrow their names also? It is, indeed, a strong argument, that modern grammarians took the Latins for their patterns, that they borrow their terms generally from them: but,

as the Irish do not, it is certainly as strong a proof on their side, to the contrary.*

St. Patrick, it is said, introduced the Roman character among the Irish. And this, I confess, is very probable, as his wish, most consistently, might have been, to have diffused Christian knowledge, and to have celebrated the rites of the church in the Latin tongue. This was the custom of all missionaries. But, it may certainly with as much propriety be inferred, that because the Jesuits in China, St. Francis Xavier, for instance, made his converts, and especially his Chinese clergy, acquainted with the Roman alphabet, that the Chinese were totally illiterate before the period of his arrival, a few years ago. But, have we not historical evidence, that St. Patrick had influence enough, to get above two hundred volumes of Druidical theology and philosophy burnt? St. Patrick, on Pagan ground, like the rest of the elect of his corps, waged war, as the Danes, Saxons, and Normans did, against arts, sciences, and letters. We read of the destruction of the records, and even of the murder of the poets and antiquaries of Wales, by an English king. We read of similar devastation in Scotland. We read, even

* Antiq. of Brit. and Ireland,

even so late as our Elizabeth's time, of an order to Sir George Carew, president of Munster, and to all the officers in Ireland, "to collect all the manuscripts they could, that they might effectually destroy every vestige of antiquity and letters throughout the kingdom." What, after this, may we not conceive to have happened during the mission of St. Patrick?

The first Irish converts never admitted any of the Roman characters, which were not found provided for in their own national method of literary communication, even when they wrote Latin words in which such characters were authoritatively used. Now, if the Irish had no letters before the introduction of the Latin alphabet, how could they have contrived constantly to reject some simple characters, and obstinately to substitute compound letters in their stead; and especially in writing a foreign tongue, to which all such characters were equally fitting? Or, if all letters were equally new and exotic to them, why had not all an equal right to be preserved by them? * The terms, however, in the Irish language, for those abstract

* Collect. de Reb. Hib.

abstract ideas, and mixed modes, which a civilized people only can invent, and which barbarians neither want nor use, demonstrate that the Irish language had arrived at a considerable degree of improvement, before the introduction of Christianity.*

The variation in the powers of the Irish letters, from those of the Romans, as well as the difference with respect to their number, must be admitted as at least good conjectural evidence, that the Pagan Irish were in possession of an alphabet, previous to the introduction of Christianity. In opposition, I know, it is said, that the proper terms in the Irish language which relate to science and letters, are merely Latin words naturalized; which would not, it is contended, be the case, had literature been cultivated by the Pagan Irish. This statement, however, I conceive to be erroneous. The Irish have terms in their language, which expressly relate to science and letters, and which have no analogy with the Latin, or any other modern dialect: they are clearly of Eastern origin.

* O Conner.

St. Patrick, we are told in the chronicles of Ireland, assisted with his advice; in the revision of the records of that country; and that those records, when thus revised, were transcribed into the *Seanchas Mór*, or Great Book of Antiquity. From this volume many copies were taken, and, with the sanction of general approbation, they were confided to the care of the Christian churches and monasteries. The Psalter of Cashell, is the sole fragment which is supposed to have reached us, of this singular work. Notwithstanding which, we are given to understand no Irish manuscript has ever been discovered, older than the tenth century, and that, therefore, the several alphabets engraven both in France and Ireland, of characters, called Irish, cannot be considered in any respect as authentic, as such characters have never been found in any ancient document.* Moreover, continues the same author, the Irish have neither written, nor inscribed monuments, nor coins, to prove their pretensions to the use of letters, at so early a period as they contend for. The oldest Irish manuscript, which has ever been discovered, is the Psalter of Cashell, written in the latter end of the the tenth century.

We have already seen, that certainly earlier than the tenth century, Ireland had been celebrated for learning. *Books* are mentioned by Bede in the seventh century: and the mention of seminaries of learning seem naturally to suppose, that at those seminaries *written* knowledge was to be communicated. Another thing is peculiarly remarkable: the nations in the world that were undeniably enlightened by the Romans, with the language and the science they acquired, learned and adopted the alphabetical character likewise. But, the Irish, out of an excess of folly, or of Milesian pride, and, as it were, universally animated by a spirit of imposition, not only took the trouble of qualifying themselves in the Roman stile of literary pursuits, but also most piously forged another alphabet, and thus fettered themselves with the labour of keeping up two written languages:

The manuscripts written in the northern parts of Scotland, and in Ireland, are in characters similar to the Saxon, says Mr. Astle; and I have already observed, says he, that the Saxon, Irish, and other characters, used by the Western nations of Europe, were derived from the Roman. The literati of Scotland subscribe to this
opi-

opinion; but, those of Ireland do not. Mr. Innes, and Mr. James Macpherson, in particular, produce incontestible evidence, to invalidate the reports of the Irish; and conclude with decisive proofs, that the manners of the old Irish were inconsistent with the knowledge of letters; and that the Ogham was a species of stenography, or writing in cypher. Mr. Innes, especially, maintains, that the alphabet of the Irish was nothing but the invention of the Irish Senacchies, who, after they received the use of letters, put the Latin alphabet into a new arbitrary order, and assigned to each letter the name of some tree; and that this was not a genuine alphabet of the Irish in ancient times, or peculiar to them, but was a bare inversion of the Latin alphabet.*

The general body of the people, among the Celtic and the Scythiac nations, were undoubtedly ignorant of letters. All knowledge and learning centered with the Druids, and the bards. Of this I have already explained the reason. During the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries, the Christian faith, with the Latin language, was zealously and successfully propagated in Ireland. And so indefatigable were the first preachers of

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* Astle.

the gospel, in Ireland, as every where else, in destroying the monuments of heathen superstition, that not one Druidic production hath come down to us. Nay, it is more than probable, that no Druidical writings were remaining in Ireland, fifty years after St. Patrick's landing. Yet, these writings, which contained the principles of their religion and philosophy, though certainly to be regretted, are, in some degree, compensated, by the detached parts of their laws and histories; which, not being on religious subjects, escaped the fury of bigots, and remained either in the minds of the people, or preserved in the Latin character, several ages after the Druidic order was no more.

The Britons of Wales, attribute their oldest code of *written* laws to *Hoel-dba*, or Hoel Bonus, who reigned early in the tenth century. And the Caledonians ascribe the *Regia Majestas*, the oldest institute of their laws, to David II. who lived in the beginning of the thirteenth century. At what period the Irish *Brebon* laws were enacted, I do not presume to say. Some of them are prefaced with a declaration, that they were the Pagan laws, revised and corrected by St. Patrick; others are, on the

the contrary, evidently of more modern date, and expressly identify the punishment to be inflicted upon the Christian, as well as upon the Pagan culprit. These laws, however, have strong internal evidence of being transplanted from an Asiatic soil. The Oriental feature is distinctly marked, as well as the Scythiac. Mr. Richardson, in examining the code of Gentoo laws, was surprized to find Arabic technically used by the natives of Hindostan. Colonel Vallancy was equally, if not more surprized, to find that the Brehon laws of the Irish abounded in Persian and Arabic terms. Thus, *saorgal*, in Irish, is a feudal tenure: in Persian, it is *siyurghal*. *Bealac*, in Irish, is a fief: in Persian, it is *beluk*. And so on in various other instances.

The Brehon laws of the Irish, seem to be counterparts of the laws of the Scythians.* For had the Irish received their feudal system from any other than an Asiatic source, they would most certainly have adopted the technical terms of the people from whom they received them. And thus we find every term reverting to the

* Anquetil du Perron.

fountain-head, the Arabic or Persian.* It is, in fact, now allowed by those who are best acquainted with the subject, as I have often had occasion to remark, that the interior parts of Europe, were as progressively enlightened from the northern parts of Asia, as the distant maritime parts were from Phœnicia, and as the home, or southern and western parts were from Africa. Thus, many inscriptions in Hebrew and Greek, for instance, have been dug up in Ireland; but, none in Latin. But, what is curious, among other charges brought by the early English adventurers against the Irish, it was said, that they adhered more to the Greek than to the Roman customs. “Ante Henrici secundi in Hiberniam adventum,” says Rivius, “Romano more in Hiberniâ non vivebatur, sed magis Græco.”

The *Iberno-Scythiac*, as it may with safety be called, or Irish language, has in it many words which are of Punic origin. The Phœnicians had undoubtedly an intercourse with Ireland, as well as with Britain, centuries before Christ; and in such intercourse, the ignorant would certainly glean much from the informed. The
Irish

* Collect. de Reb. Hib.

Irish has demonstrably a radical identity with the Punic.* The Carthaginians, who were confessedly a Phœnician colony, were, like the Irish, called Poeni; and that they spoke the Phœnician language, will not be doubted. Now, nothing is more clear, than that the *Bearla-Pheini*, or Irish, is almost exactly the same with the Carthaginian.

The Phœnician, or Greek, and Irish letters, are in appearance alike; and are pronounced in the same manner. In every respect, they resemble each other; and much more than the Irish do the Roman. But, as the Roman were confessedly borrowed from the Greek or Phœnician, what very satisfactory objection can be brought against the Irish having had letters previous to Christianity, although the Irish letters had even some distant similitude to the Roman? Both are designed after the same originals; and even were there any very striking family resemblance, one would suppose this should speak rather affirmatively, than negatively. The first letters of the Greeks, were precisely the Irish which are used at this day, The number is the same; and there is little or

* Vallançy.

no difference in the order of the alphabet. The manner of writing, likewise, on some occasions, made use of by the Greeks, and which they borrowed from the Phœnicians, called *Bougeοφηδον*, plowing with oxen; (as, like the ridges of a plough, it went in parallel lines from right to left, and from left to right) is still to be met with in some Irish records; and seems to be formed on the same plan, and written in the same manner. In the old Greek, also, as in the old Irish, a single letter stood for an entire word: a circumstance, as far as I know, not to be found in any other than Scythiac or Hærographical languages. *Alpha*, in Greek, signified greatness: *Ailim*, in Irish, imports eminence.*

In travelling through Sweden, says Coxe, I could not but be struck with the strong resemblance between the language of that country, and that of England: it is not merely, that words are the same; whole phrases are so exceedingly similar, that an Englishman of any penetration, can readily understand a great deal in any ordinary conversation. This evidently arises from both languages being dialects of the
ancient

* O Halloran.

ancient Teutonic or German. The ancient Saxon, of which the English is formed, was probably introduced into England, by the conquerors or colonies, who issued from these Northern kingdoms. M. Mallet, Coxe's translator into French, remarks, that the English and Swedish Dictionary of Serenius, offers, at almost every page, examples of the surprising affinity of the two languages; but, that this is not all: the same, he adds, is to be observed of the Norwegian, and of the Danish, as relative to the English. In certain cantons of Denmark, in Jutland particularly, says he, "the very peasants speak a language, which has the greatest resemblance to the language of the peasants of the northern parts of England." Now, if the Anglo-Celtic be from the Teutonic, why should not the Ibero-Scythiac be from the Punic?

It will not, I hope, be argued, that the children of Tyre were illiterate. The great Hannibal was a lover of Greek learning, and composed several books in that language.* Silenus, another Carthaginian, wrote history in Greek.† Sallust speaks of Punic books, in his History of

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* Cor. Nep,

† Cicero,

the Jugurthan War; and we know that Mago's Treatise of Rural Œconomy, in twenty-eight books, and in the language of Carthage, was translated by order of the Roman senate, although the elder Cato had previously handled that important subject. So celebrated, indeed, were the Carthaginians, that at the reduction of Carthage, the Romans, still governed by husbandmen, supposed that this book of Mago merited public attention, and the general was ordered to secure it for the state.

In these days of general enquiry, the traces of ancient nations should be sought for, where luckily the Romans had no footing. External violence, or internal decay, gradually extirpated almost every one the Romans were connected with. The fewer the materials furnished to the history of the Roman empire, the more unequivocal the antiquity of the people. It is well remarked by Lhuyd, however, that there is no written language, which has not often changed either its letters, or the pronunciation of its letters, or both. Thus, Polybius, on the same ground, informs us, that the Carthaginians were the first foreign nation the Romans entered into an alliance with, out of their own continent; and

and that a treaty of commerce and navigation, was concluded between them, as early as the consulship of Brutus, which treaty was engraved on a marble pillar; but, that when this inscription was discovered, so soon after as the second Punic war, no Roman was to be found, who could read it. Such an alteration had even the Latin tongue suffered in that short space of time.

The Punic letters, we also know, underwent considerable alteration: "Facto senatusconsulto, ne quis postea Carthaginensis, aut literis Græcis, aut Græco sermoni studeret, ne aut loqui cum hoste, aut scribere sine interprete posset." * The Carthaginians, indeed, it is averred, adopted the Roman alphabet very early. In later ages, it is true, the Latin language was the common dialect of the Africans, as well as the Punic. St. Augustin tells us, he himself learned the Latin language in Africa; inter blandimenta nutricum. And the same author notifies the decay of the Punic language: "Proverbiam notum est Punicum, quod quidam Latine vobis dicam, quis Punicè non omnes nostis." The Roman characters were intro-

* Justin.

duced into Carthage, as early as the first Punic war. Supposing, then, even the strongest similitude between the Irish and the Latin alphabet, what is the unforced consequence from this fact? Assuredly, not that the Irish could not have received letters from the Phœnicians. On the contrary, the Carthaginians having borrowed the Roman, and the Irish having adopted the Carthaginian, the fair inference would be, that the Irish being in such manner connected with both, might very naturally be supposed to bear a genuine derivative resemblance to both. What was the character in which Plautus wrote his comedy of *Pœnulus*? The Punic speech, which he puts into the mouth of one of his dramatis personæ, is, I am told, accurately good Irish, Colonel Vallancy has at least declared it to be so, and has even been able to translate it. This was written during the second Punic war, and has been transmitted down to us in the Latin letter. Nay, is not St. Patrick, in his own life, made to declare, that Fiech, the great poet of Ireland, found so little difference in the character, that he read the Latin Gospels in fourteen days, and also composed an ode in praise of the Saint? *

* Vallancy.

The affinity of the Irish language with the Punic shews, that though the details of heathen Irish history may be fabulous, the foundations may be laid in truth. It demonstrates the early use of letters in Ireland, because nothing but that use could preserve the least affinity, from the flourishing æra of Carthage to the present time, a space of more than 2300 years. It accounts, also, for the Irish assuming the name of Phenî, which they have retained through all ages; as it does for their giving the name of Bearla-Phenî, or Phœnician tongue, to one of their native dialects. In fine, it shews that when they adopted the Phœnician syntax, they confined their language to Oriental orthography, while it harmonized itself, and corrected its primitive consonantal Celtic asperity, by the suppression of many radical letters, in the pronunciation of words.

Notwithstanding the high probability, that the Phœnician and Punic traders did introduce letters both into Ireland and into Britain, yet the truth would still remain involved in obscurity, and a doubt would for ever hang on the assertions relative to the improved state of the Pagan Irish, if we were not in possession of
evi-

evidence from monuments of antiquity; some of which plainly owe their existence to ages prior, by some centuries, to the establishment of Christianity in Ireland. The inscriptions found on these monuments, confirm, beyond the power of refutation, the assertions of the Irish antiquaries, respecting the literature of the Pagan inhabitants of Ireland. The characters bear not only a great affinity to those of the ancient Phœnicians, Carthaginians, and Egyptians, but, in several instances, are exactly the same; as may be seen, on comparing them with the characters and inscriptions on the Bembine, and Ramessæan Tables, of Egyptian inscription.* An Ogham inscription has lately been discovered on what is called the Monument of Conan, which, being decyphered on principles established previous to its discovery, is found to be an epitaph on a chieftain, who fell in the battle of Gabhra, a century and a half before the birth of Christ.

The source of the old Greek, and of the old Irish, says Vallancey, spring from the same fountain-head, the Phœnician, mixed with the Pelasgian, or Scythian; for Scuthæ was the

* Collect, de Reb. Hib.

Greek name for the Pelasgi, signifying Northern wanderers. Whereas, Kelt, on the contrary, implied a fixed people, and was a name which the Scythians, or Pelasgi, gave to those colonies that had long resided in a place. The Irish had the *Bobeloth*, or common letter, and the *Ogham*, or sacred letter. The former was the same, or nearly the same, with the Phœnician. The latter, like the Egyptian, was an alphabetic and hieroglyphic compound. The Irish was the character formerly used in Spain, as is evident from the manuscripts copied in Aldretes *Origin de la Lingua Castellana*.

The ancient Ogham consisted of two species, the Ogham, and Ogham Croabh. The Ogham was the sacred character of the Druids, and was probably so called from the Hebrew word *och-um*, or *bogham*, which signifies wisdom. And hence, as these are words of foreign extraction, a probable reason why the letters under this denomination, were not the invention of the Hiber-Druids, but, the sacred characters of the Carthaginian, Phœnician, and Egyptian priests, if not of all the Heathen priests of antiquity; for Herodotus assures us, that the Greeks and Ionians wrote in characters composed entirely of
right

right lines; and such are actually found in several Egyptian inscriptions. The Goths, also, wrote in straight lines, called by them *run-rbets*, or furrows of wisdom. These sacred characters, however, particularly those of the Egyptians, are not to be confounded with their hieroglyphics. The sacred, and the popular writing, were quite distinct from the hieroglyphical.* The *γραμματα ιερογλυφικα*, did not stand as alphabetical characters, for the marks of sounds; they were meant to express the things themselves. The *γραμματα*, were simply characters or letters, for the composition of syllables.†

Beside the Phœnician, we have still another Asiatic reference to make, which is highly remarkable. What the ancient Persian was, I am ignorant. No mortal can pretend to know it, with any shadow of exactness; nor can the Greeks give us any light whatever on the subject.‡ Yet, the proofs are far more than conjectural, that the Irish Ogham is the character that was found on the monuments at Persepolis.

* Warburton. Court de Caylus.

† Diod. Sicul.

‡ Sir W. Jones.

The Irish language abounds with Eastern terms. Most of the Persian names of the Supreme God, of the demons, the peri, the angels, &c. are still preserved in the Irish. Even the Persian names of the priests of the Ghebres, are Irish. These, surely, were not derived from the Romans; neither can they, without much violence to common sense, be supposed the fabrication of monks of the sixth, seventh, or eighth centuries. Attend to the following words, which are a few, out of hundreds of radicals and derivatives, which are to be adduced on the subject. They are indiscriminately picked out, and are all taken from the Sanskreet, Arabic and Persian.

FIN.

IRISH.		SANSKRIT.
Brom, Wisdom.	- - - - -	Bramha.
Béd, a Book of Divinity.	- - - - -	Béde.
Sheister, ditto	- - - - -	Shastar.
Om, an Emblem of the Divinity.	- - - - -	Om.
Seathar, God.	- - - - -	Sat, a name of Brahma.
Krishean, Holy, a Priest.	- - - - -	Krishen, one of the names of God.
Sannas, Holy.	- - - - -	Sannasseys, Mendicant Priests.
Beasna, Divine preservation.	- - - - -	Veshnoo, the Deity in his preserving Quality.
Fear-own, God of the Ocean.	- - - - -	Varoon.
Daghda, the Deity of Fire.	- - - - -	Daghda, burnt.
Ogh, Holy abstraction.	- - - - -	Yog, Mental application in Spiritual things.
Mathar, Matter.	- - - - -	Mohat.
Gubha, the Muses.	- - - - -	Gopia.
Lo, Light.	- - - - -	Loò.
Giogail, to herd.	- - - - -	Ghogiol.
Gàna, to sing.	- - - - -	Ghána.

IRISH.	PENICA MALTESE.	ARABIC and PERSIAN.
Ban, a Son-in-law.	- - - - - Bin, or Ben.	- - - Bin, or Ben.
Dars, a Habitation.	- - - - - Dar, or Dars.	- - - Dar, or Dars.
Boith, a Cottage.	- - - - - Beit.	- - - Beit.
Daras ne bene, a Nunnery.	- - - - - Darel binat.	- - - Dar el binat.
Both-all, Domus Dei.	- - - - - Bet-al.	- - - Bet-al,
Bothlan, Domus Satiatis.	- - - - - Bet e lem.	- - - Bet e lem.
Feitheas, to give attention.	- - - - - Feithh.	- - - Feithh.
Amh, but.	- - - - - Emma.	- - - Umma.
Eisd mé, hear me.	- - - - - Esma.	- - - Esma.
For, over, beyond.	- - - - - Far.	- - - Far.
Adhbas, a Garrison.	- - - - - Hh-apas, a Prison for Slaves.	- - - Hhapas.
Achmhim, Potent, able.	- - - - - Hakeem.	- - - Hukeem.
Abhra, Speech, News.	- - - - - Habbur.	- - - Hubbur.
Daille, the Night.	- - - - - Lail.	- - - Laille.
Loghda, an allowance.	- - - - - Logma.	- - - Logma.
Meath, Decay, death.	- - - - - Meut.	- - - Meut.
		Gara,

IRISH.	PUNICA MALTESE.	ARABIC AND PERSIAN.
Gara, near at hand.	- - - - -	- - - - - Gara.
All, God.	- - - - -	- - - - - Alla.
Freasdal, an Angel.	- - - - -	- - - - - Ferishta.
Cabra, a Sepulchre.	- - - - -	- - - - - Cubbur.
Amra, a Noble.	- - - - -	- - - - - Orarah.
Cabaister, a Poet.	- - - - -	- - - - - Cubbister.
Luscuraidh, a Camp.	- - - - -	- - - - - Lashkar.
Noir, Aurora, brightness.	- - - - -	- - - - - Noor.
Neoch-Ainim, of good fame.	- - - - -	- - - - - Neik-Nama.
Piosa, Money.	- - - - -	- - - - - Pysa.
Bann, Water.	- - - - -	- - - - - Pani.
Raigh, Night.	- - - - -	- - - - - Raath.
Son, Sound.	- - - - -	- - - - - Sonna.
Teibe, a Physician.	- - - - -	- - - - - Tubbeeb.
Socaitte, hardness.	- - - - -	- - - - - Suth.
Waih, good.	- - - - -	- - - - - Waih.

I will

I will not fatigue you with further examples. Turn, however, to the *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, and you will find such a multiplicity of proper names and derivatives, as will astonish you. Rivers, mountains, plains, countries, &c. are not alone the objects that will arrest your attention: besides these there are agricultural and domestic instruments, the implements of arts, and the appropriate appellations in manufactures and commerce; and such are equally, if not more conclusive, in ascertaining the Asiatic descent of the ancient Irish language. The Scythians believed their founder had three sons, Leipoxain, Arpoxain, and Kolaxain.* This termination of xain, says Pellontier, seems to me, to be the same as sahn of the Germans, and son of the English, as Anderson, Johnson, Donaldson, &c. But, what will you say to the adjuncts O' and Mac, being both of Oriental origin? Mac occurs even in Genesis: it denotes a descendant. O' implies a son in eminence. Thus, says the Abbé Renaudot, the Egyptian name O'Siris, is formed of Chiris, or Siris, that is, the sun, and O' (filius): therefore, O'Chiris, or O'Siris, is, le fils de soleil par excellence. Now, is not this enough for all the O's and all the Macs that ever sprung from the Scythiac or Celtic stem?

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• Herodotus.

If they go farther back, they must incontinently come to a plebeian root, and this is what tenacious genealogy will not be pleased with. But, I will here have done with Hiberno-Oriental deductions, after simply remarking, that many even of the ancient Greek words, are from the same Pelasgian source with the Irish. For example, Delphi, one of the oldest cities of Greece, was remarkable for its oracle. Æschyles, Euripides, Pindar, and others, call this city Ομφαλος. Now, Omphaile, or Om-faile, in ancient Irish, is the cave or den of augury, or of fate. The same occurs in the word Προφηται, in Irish *Brophaitib*, or prophets to this temple of Delphi; who, we are told, by a very ancient tradition, preserved by Pausanias, came from beyond the sea.*

* Vallancy.

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LETTER LXXIX.

WE are inattentive to the vicissitudes in human affairs. We imperceptibly advance from youth to age, without observing the gradual, but incessant change. But, if the interval between two memorable æras could be instantly annihilated; if it were possible, after a slumber of two thousand years, to display the new world to the eyes of a spectator, who still retained a recent and lively impression of the old, his surprize, and his reflections, would furnish the most pleasing subject for a philosophical romance. Here, we should see Rome transplanted to the banks of the Thracian Bosphorus; the fabulous gods of antiquity extirpated; the public devotion of the age impatient to exalt the Saints and Martyrs of the Catholic church, on the altars of Diana and Hercules; the union of the Roman empire dissolved; its genius humbled in the dust; the armies of unknown nations issuing from the frozen regions

of the North, and finally establishing themselves in a victorious dominion over the fairest provinces of Europe and Africa.

The settlement of the Milesians, under the name of Scots, in Ireland, says Mr. Macpherson, is the capital point established by the pretended literature of the Heathen Irish. Should this early settlement be once ascertained, it might naturally be expected to follow, that the British Scots, if they derived their blood from the Irish, should have carried with them to Caledonia that learning, science, and civility, which had made so great a progress in their mother country, before they transmigrated from it. But, nothing is more certain, than that the British Scots were an illiterate people, and involved in barbarism, even *after* St. Patrick's mission to the Scots of Ireland. The abettors of the Irish antiquities are then reduced to this dilemma; either the Scots of North Britain did not derive their origin from Ireland, or else the Irish had not any knowledge of letters, when the British Scots transmigrated from their country. If the first position be true, the whole Milesian tale is at an end; if the latter, on the other hand, be the fact, no memory remains in
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Ireland of transactions prior to the mission of St. Patrick, and the reign of Leogaire.

Mr. Macpherson still goes farther, and says, "When monkish learning flourished in Ireland, the Scots of Britain, by an uninterrupted series of hostilities with the Britons, Picts, and Saxons, were diverted from cultivating letters, which alone could enable them to look back into their antiquities, or to transmit any memory of their transactions to posterity. Their exploits in the field died away for want of means of perpetuating them in the closet. The monks of Ireland, as it was manifest to the whole world, that both the Scottish nations were the same people, made an easy acquisition of an illiterate, though brave people, and obtruded upon the world the system of the origin of the Caledonian Scots, which has been for many ages almost universally received. Hibernian missionaries converted the greatest part of the Picts and Scots of Britain; from the errors of the Pagan superstition, Legions of monks and saints swarmed from Ireland into North Britain, in the early days of conversion, and religious peregrination. It was natural for an illiterate people, like the British Scots, to believe, that a nation, which produced

those holy, and very extraordinary men, was one of the most illustrious in the world."

The concessions here made by this very able writer, (and yet they must have been unintentional, as the general proposition is advanced as one of the strongest in his attack) are too palpable, after what I have already said, to require any separate or further discussion. In justice and candour, he is forced to acknowledge, that the Irish had, in early times, some few rays of light among them. He grants, they had a superior degree of literature; and he allows their missionaries to have had successful talents at conversion. More, I do not demand. And especially, as besides what I have laid before you, I have a few collateral proofs of the integrity of my argument, which he, probably, was not aware of.

It has been said, that neither coins, nor relics of former splendor, of any kind, have been traced, or dug up in Ireland. This is certainly a mistake. In regard to money, Irish coins have frequently been found.* In the days of Druidism, the head of every family paid annually to the king of Munster a *scrubal* of silver, (a three-

* O Halloran.

three-penny piece). The scrubal of gold is also mentioned in assessments. In 1074, Lanfranc, bishop of Canterbury, in a letter to Tíreldach, the monarch of Ireland, censures the the Irish dignitaries for conferring holy orders for money. From Matthew Paris we learn, that in the days of king John, that sovereign sent the bishop of Norwich as justiciary of the English pale, " who caused the money of the country to be stamped according to the weight of English money, and ordered, that both the half-penny and the farthing should be struck round." It has been urged, indeed, that where mention is made in the Irish annals of gold or silver, the weight, not the value, is noticed; and hence it has been supposed, that though the pure metal went in the course of exchange, yet, the value of money was not ascertained by impression. But, the same argument might hold good at this very hour, if, indeed, such were the fact, against the Chinese having any circulating money; for though they have a coin called *cash*, which is not the value of a farthing, yet all their dealings of moment, are transacted through the medium of weight, and the purity of the precious metals. But, the fact is, there are Irish silver coins, some, for
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example, with this epigraph on the face, *Re Morab*, King O Mora, or O More; and on the reverse, *Na Dunegb*, or, of the Fort. The letters, are the ancient Ogham Croabh. And here it is not unworthy of remark, that the epigraph on the face, instead of the exurgue, is the precise Oriental custom of this day. No portrait is on an Eastern coin, except that of a divinity. The Druids, probably, interdicted the use of the images of kings. Was not this the case, likewise, with the Hebrew shekel?

At the time of the Trojan war, the use of money was unknown to the Greeks. Homer and Hesiod, who lived after that period, say not a word of gold or silver money: they express the value of a thing by saying, it was worth such a number of oxen or sheep. They express the riches of a private man by the multitude of his flocks and herds. The Romans, also, till a little before the siege of Tarentum, U. C. 481, had no coin but copper; and estimated considerable sums more commonly by the head of cattle, than by money. They coined money, for the first time, U. C. 325. Gold was only known as a precious material, and was sometimes joined with oxen in
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the reward of distinguished services.* And hence, that the authority of the first consuls should be firmly established, a penalty of five oxen and two sheep, was denounced against every person who refused to obey them.† But, we need not go so far back. To say nothing of gold, even silver was scarce in England, during the reign of the third Edward. Rents were paid in kind; and what money the English had, was locked up in the coffers of the great barons. Pieces of plate were bequeathed, even by kings of England, so trifling, according to present estimation, that a gentleman of a moderate fortune would scarcely mention such in his will. Among the northern nations of Europe, likewise, in the tenth century, money was scarcely known. “*Illa vero tempestate nulla erat in terra moneta, sed rebus res commutantes vetustissimo more mercebantur.*” ‡

The Irish took the field, like their brethren of Britain, in gorgeous array. Several of Ossian's heroes, are described as fighting in chariots. “Did thy beauty last, O Ryno! Stood the strength of car-borne Oscar! The eagle wing of my helmet is torn, My stride is in the
clang

* Pliny.

† Plutarch.

‡ Krantz.

clang of steel. I rejoice not over the foe, when he ceases to lift the spear. But, our swords go together to the field! My gleaming steel is around, the terror of my foes. Look on him, O moon, from thy clouds, be thy beam bright on his breast, that Comala may behold him in the light of his armour." Their military accoutrements are, indeed, out of dispute. Their enemies allow they had arms. Yet, there is one fact which is curious. The Carthaginian swords, found near the plains of Cannæ, and the Irish swords, so frequently met with, and some of which are now in the British Museum, are, as to size, shape, and mixture of metals, so exactly similar, that the assay master of the mint, who examined both, pronounced they were cast in the same furnace,*

Ornaments in gold and silver have been often dug up in Ireland. In the year 1692, a crown of gold was found, raised in chase work, which must have been made before the Christian æra, as it had not the cross, which, after that period, the crowns of Christian princes never were without. It seems, also, to be a monarch's crown, having a resemblance to the close crown of the east. Other crowns of gold have likewise

* Governor Pownall.

wise been found, as well as gorgets of gold, and gold-handled swords. This, however, you will say, proves nothing. It may be so. I cannot help, at the same time, looking upon one crown as I would upon another. Crowns have been dug up in Spain, in Italy, and in Germany. And yet so ignorant were the Spanish Christians during the eighth and ninth centuries, that Alphonsus the Great, king of Leon, was reduced to the necessity of employing Mahometan preceptors for educating his eldest son. Even Charlemagne could not sign his name; nor was he singular in that respect, being kept in countenance by several neighbouring princes.

From Sir James Ware, and his followers, one would be led to suppose, there were formerly no other structures in Ireland, than straw-built cottages. This, among other things, has continued that idea of barbarism, which has been so strongly inculcated, but which, in fact, is erroneous, as there are still existing many reputable monuments at least of ecclesiastical architecture in Ireland. In what manner, in parity of reasoning, should we judge of the English in the fifteenth century, from Hollingshed's account, who was contemporary with Elizabeth? "There were very few chimnies even in the capital

capital towns : the fire was laid to the wall, and the smoke issued out at the roof, or door, or window. The houses were wattled, and plastered over with clay ; and all the furniture and utensils were of wood. The people slept on straw pallets, with a log of wood for a pillow." Yet, Westminster, York, and all the extraordinarily beautiful cathedrals of England, were erected, and of considerable antiquity, when this author wrote. Or, shall we subscribe to what Cambrensis writes of the English, in the latter end of the twelfth century ? This secretary of Henry II. the first British invader of Ireland, says, " it was the common vice of the English, from their first settlement in Britain, to expose their children and relations to sale." The certainty of this custom is also confirmed by Milton, who, on what appeared to him good authority, shews, " that the wife of earl Godwin, who was sister to Canute, the Danish king of England, made great gain by the trade, she drove, of buying up English youths and maids to sell to Denmark."

In England, castles walled with stone, and designed for residence as well as defence, are, for the most part, of no higher antiquity than the conquest ; for although the Saxons, Romans,

mans, and even, according to some very respectable writers, the ancient Britons had castles built with stone; yet, these were both few in number, and, at that period, through neglect or invasions, either destroyed, or so much decayed, that little more than their ruins were remaining.* Hence, the facility of the conquest. And hence William's care to erect castles all over the kingdom. "Nam Rex Gul. Conquestor ad castella construenda totam Angliam fatigabat."

In Ireland, on the contrary, there are what are called the *round towers*, and which are traditionally said to have been erected by the Phœnicians or Carthaginians. M. Beaufort says, *clogha* is the Ibero-Celtic name of these slender buildings; and that they are of the same construction with the *pyrathea* of the ancient Persians, and the *chamnia* of the Phœnicians and Carthaginians; that the Hibernian Druids erected these temples in their sanctuaries; and that they derived the custom from the Persian Magi, or Gaiirs, and in them kept the holy fire. These ancient structures have occasioned variety of conjectures, by whom they were

* Grose.

were built, and for what purposes they were intended. Beside the opinion already mentioned, some writers have ascribed them to the Danes, and others to the native Irish. That they were not of Danish origin, however, may be inferred, from no such edifices being found in any of the various countries occupied or visited by that warlike people, excepting two which are in Scotland. They could not have been all intended for beacons, because they appear, from the situations of those which remain, to have been erected as often on low and level ground, as on high and commanding eminences. Nor is it reasonable to suppose, they were designed for the retreat of anchorets, on the first introduction of Christianity into the island; for no other nation whatever exhibits such sanctuaries for hermits. But, may they not, it is asked, have been used as belfries? No doubt, they might. At the same time, it is no proof that this was the case, that they were always, as is alledged, erected in the neighbourhood of ecclesiastical edifices: for these edifices themselves were not so solidly built, being all of wood. In all probability, these round towers were used by the Pagan Irish in the celebration of their religious rites. That they might subsequently be applied to the
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uses ascribed to them; by the Danes, as watch-towers; by the first clergy, as belfries; and by the anchorets, as hermitages, may be readily believed. The number of these towers yet remaining in Ireland, is said to be upwards of sixty; many 110 feet high, one 130. It is not clear, that any, at present existing, are older than the sixth century. The construction of the most ancient is with rock, and without cement.

A fact, however, of no very easy explanation, has lately been communicated to the world.* Collieries of coal, in the very remotest periods of time, were wrought in Ireland. The accidental discovery of an extensive mine, wrought by a set of people, at least as expert in the business as the present generation, and the antiquity of which is such, that there does not remain the most remote tradition of it in the country, serves at least to prove, that such things were worked in ages when the civilization and ability of the Irish, are held to have been unequal to such an undertaking. From the floor to the roof, and in all the chambers, pillars of stalactites have accumulated; no very equivocal symptom of antiquity. Nor can the working

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* M. Hamilton.

of this mine be attributed to the Danes, who were unaccustomed to such patient, and scientific labours. What shall we say, then, of these Irish barbarians, and of their country, cursed, as it is described, as a wilderness of forests and bogs? Do savage people ransack the bowels of the earth for coal, while their woods and turf afford such abundant fuel to their land? In the reign of Edward the First of England, coal, after being tried in London, was immediately prohibited as noxious. But, you will recollect what I have already said on this subject.

Of the Druids, I have spoken at large. A word or two more, however, on what appears relative to them from the history of the Irish. Many antiquarians, from the authority of Cæsar, give the institution of Druidism to Britain; and probably they, as well as their authority, are in the right. Druidism might have arisen in the western hemisphere, from the mixed colonies of Pelasgians, &c. who found their way into the British isles. But, Britain was not the birth-place of Druidism.* Dr. Borlase was surprized at the conformity in temples, priests, worship, doctrines, and divinations, between two such distant people as the

* Vallancy.

the British Druids, and the Persian Magi. This wonderful agreement, says he, between the Persians, and the western nations of Europe, was too obvious to escape the notice of the judicious and learned Pelloutier; therefore, he takes it for granted, that the Celts and Persians were one and the same people. But, continues Dr. Borlase; this is perhaps rather going too far. We had our inhabitants from Gaul, as the nearest part of the continent to Britain, and with the inhabitants came the Celtic language; but, the Druids had no being when this island was peopled, their discipline being invented or introduced afterwards, as is plain from the Germans, Danes, Swedes, and Russians, who were branches of the Celts, and yet had no Druids. Had they been really Celtic priests, they would have spread with the several divisions of that mighty nation.*

In his fourth book, Strabo says, there was an island near Britain, in which the natives worshipped Ceres and Proserpine, with the same rites they did in Samothrace. This, he puts into the mouth of Artimidorus, who is supposed to have lived before the Grecians had discovered any thing of the British seas, so that

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* Borlase.

the Grecians could not have introduced the worship of Ceres and Prosperine. To whom, then, were they indebted for these divinities? To the Phœnicians? Apollo, we are told, was the principal god of the Pagan Irish, and that it is because the harp was sacred to him, that this instrument is the ensign armorial of Ireland. The worship of Baal, we are likewise told, was known to the Ibero-Celts. The name of Baal, which signifies Dominus, was the first name of the true God. Afterwards it was, by express command, changed, when the Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Phœnicians, bestowed that sacred name upon the sun.*

The Pagan Irish never admitted the modern deities of the Greeks or Romans into their worship; even to the days of St. Patrick, their rites were purely Assyrian.† And, at the same time, the Irish Druids, like their Scythian ancestors, permitted no image worship. The unchiselled stone was the only emblem used by all ancient nations. The Chinese and Hindoos still retain this stone, though their pagodas are crowded with images; and Pausanias declares, that all the ancient Greeks had no other emblem of their deities. Before the time of Mahommed,

* Hesea. Cap. 2.

† Vallancy.

hommed, the Arabs had no other; and the mater deorum of the Romans, was a rough, black stone.

I am now arrived nearly at the close of this intricate and obscure investigation. I will not flatter myself with the hope, of having entirely satisfied you upon this subject. I will, however, venture to say, as far as fairness of intention goes, I have entirely satisfied myself. The sketch is, indeed, a meagre one. But, you must look upon it with indulgence, and as you would upon a description in your favourite Ossian. The scenery throughout is wild and romantic. The extended heath by the sea shore; the mountain shaded with mist; the torrent, rushing through a solitary valley; the scattered oaks, and the tomb of warriors, overgrown with moss; all these demand attention. They, at least, lead us "to the voice of years that are gone; to the years that roll before us, with all their deeds." *

In regard to the first communications between Caledonia and Ireland, tradition is silent. Orosius, however, who lived in the fourth century, says, *Hibernia Scotorum gentibus collitur.*

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* Ossian.

In process of time, says venerable Bede, the country of Britain, after it had been inhabited by the Britons and Picts, was possessed, on the side of the Picts, by a nation of the Scots, who came out of Ireland, and made themselves masters of those lands, which they enjoy to this day, either by friendship or by force. Giraldus Cambrensis expresses himself in similar terms; speaking of the Irish, he says, "*Gens ab his propagata specificato vocabulo Scotica vocatur in hodiernum.*"

One apparently strong reason, indeed, is advanced against the Scots migration from Ireland into Caledonia, says Mr. Whitaker, for it is said, if they were compelled by poverty, or from being overstocked, to go in quest of foreign settlements, they ought, in common prudence, to have tried their fortune in the southern division of the country, and not in the sterile mountains of the western Caledonia. But, Bede is explicit and satisfactory upon this point. "*Est, autem sinus maris permaximus, qui antiquitus gentem Britonum a Pictis secernebat, qui ab occidente in terras longo spatio erumpit, ubi est civitas Britonum munitissima usque hodie, quæ vocatur Alchuth: ad cujus videlicet sinus partem septentrionalem Scotti, quos diximus,*

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advenientes, sibi locum patriæ fecerunt." Bede, we see, thus fixes the Scots, not along the western Highlands and isles, but, merely upon the northern banks of the Clyde,

In the year of Christ 320, it is said, Fergus established himself from Ireland in Caledonia, with a body of troops, and the authority of a sovereign, and then fixed the appellation *Scots*, within the island of Britain. Thence the name was carried gradually with their possessions, over the whole extent of the present Scotland. And Hibernians, Caledonians, Roman Britons, and Saxons, have all concurred to form the present respectable nation of the Scots.* This system, however, of Richard of Cirencester, who wrote in the fourteenth century, is not considered as of sterling validity. The historian of the Roman empire acquaints us, on the authority of Claudian, that the Irish, or Scots, about the year 407, invaded the whole western coast of Britain. This, again, is not considered as absolutely the first settlement of the Scots in Caledonia. The first tribe, under the name of Dalreudini, or Attacotti, afterwards Scoti, landed, says Pinkerton, from Ireland, under their leader Riada, about the year 250 of

our æra. The Picts, who had come from Scandinavia, permitted them to settle in Argyleshire, where they remained about two hundred years. They then were driven back into Ireland. Recovering themselves, however, they returned about fifty years afterwards, under Fergus, the son of Ere, who established his Scottish kingdom in the same district, about the year 503. The Scots, the Picts, and the Caledonians, afterwards united under one sovereign, in 840, and then took the single name of Scots.

About the accuracy of these dates, it is not necessary for us to enquire. It is very immaterial to the object of our pursuit, which of them be entitled to the highest degree of credit, I cannot, however, allow you to part from Irish antiquity altogether, until you derive, in a very few words, a much more comprehensive view of the subject, than I, perhaps, with all my pains, have been able to give you. The writer of what I am now to communicate to you, is the learned Dr. Barnard, an English divine of literary reputation, and at present a bishop in Ireland. It had been well, had his work fallen into my hands somewhat sooner, as it would have saved us both a considerable degree of heavy

heavy investigation. But, I was ignorant that the bishop had written on so uninviting a question; and my own little arrangement, when his dissertation fell into my hands, had been too far advanced, for me to give it up entirely.

“ The origin of that portion of the inhabitants of Britain, properly called Scots,” says the bishop, “ has been in point of history so established by the concurrence of all writers on that subject, both native and foreign, from venerable Bede, down to Sir George Mackenzie, that, for a period of at least nine hundred years, it was never esteemed matter of question, until some late Scottish antiquarians, anxious to support an hypothesis inconsistent with their own annals and tradition, have thought proper wholly to reject the received opinion of their ancestors on this head, and to offer to the public in its place, an entire new system of their own, founded on arguments of probability, sufficiently plausible and ingenious, but, unsupported by written testimonies, or any authentic documents whatever,

“ Having read, with some degree of attention, what has been produced in this controversy on both sides of the question, and compared

pared it, as well with the ancient histories of the Scots and Irish, as with the evidence of such foreign writers as make mention of them, I am of opinion, that a system may be formed from these materials, equally consistent with probability and written authority, which rather tends to reconcile, than to subvert the opinions of both parties; and is, at the same time, supported by as convincing evidence, as truth, at this distance of time, is capable of receiving.

“ It appears to be highly probable, that the north of Ireland might have been originally peopled from the adjacent parts of Caledonia, as the Scottish antiquarians assert, and that the southern inhabitants of the island might have derived their origin from their neighbours in South Britain (perhaps from the Belgæ and Damnonii, whose posterity in Ireland were called Firbolghs, and Tuatha de Danan): I am therefore ready to admit that the Irish might have been the children, rather than the parents of the Caledonians,

“ But, this concession, as to the first population of Ireland, has no tendency to invalidate the history of a certain Milesian dynasty having, in process of time, invaded, and obtained the domi-

dominion of the country, without extirpating the ancient natives: for have not the Romans, Saxons, Danes, and Normans in Britain, and the English in Ireland, since done the same? But, no one, I believe, has been so absurd as to infer, that either of these kingdoms was peopled, as well as subdued by the invaders. It is equally an error, to suppose that the Irish chronicles derive the blood of their whole nation from these Milesians; for none, but their princes, and the spreading branches of their posterity, pretend to trace their families from this honourable source.

“ If genealogies had been preserved in England, with the same attention as they were in Ireland, we should probably be astonished to find as many of our fellow-subjects, now in poverty and obscurity, with royal blood flowing in their veins, in one country, as in the other. Whoever has read the short history of the line of Plantagenet, published towards the beginning of this century, will be sensible of the truth of this observation. But, the Irish genealogical tables, which are still extant, carry intrinsic proofs of their being genuine and authentic, by their chronological accuracy, and consistency with each other, through all the lines collateral, as well

well as direct; a consistency not to be accounted for, on the supposition of their being fabricated in a subsequent age of darkness and ignorance; but, easily explained, if we admit them to have been drawn from the source of real family records and truth. So much of the Irish history as relates to the names and succession of their princes, will certainly stand against every reasonable objection to its credibility, whatever suspicion of errors, or even fiction, may lie against other circumstances contained in it.

“ As to the high antiquity, and long duration of the Milesian dynasty in Ireland, I can discern nothing incredible in the account of it. It is natural to suppose, that at what time soever this Spanish, or Celtiberian colony took possession of Ireland, its leader became king; and when we consider the remoteness of this island from foreign invasion, we shall think it less wonderful, that its succession should have continued unchanged through such a long line of Milesian princes. The same circumstances, in the annals of China, do not shock our belief; and we account for it from the same cause, namely, its being separated from all connection with the rest of the world, which preserved it, until the Tartan invasion, from those revolutions which have

so frequently changed the government of other countries. And, to come nearer home for an example, the Scottish line, still happily reigning in Great Britain, tracing it no higher than to its unquestioned ancestor, Fergus II. is, at this day, no less ancient, than the line of the Milesians was at the period, down to which the written antiquities of that country still extant are carried.

“ I shall not here enter into a discussion concerning the most ancient and authentic annals of Ireland, said to have been framed under the sanction of public authority, from time to time, till the invasion of the Danes ; but, as I before observed, even in those more recent compilations which now remain, we find none of those palpable contradictions in different historians, none of those uncertainties and variations in the names and order of their kings, which appear in the histories of the darker ages of other nations, where fiction or tradition has supplied the want of authentic materials. A general agreement appears in the names and lineage of that long series of princes, that succeeded and descended from the first conquerors to the fifth century ; and the descent of the collateral branches, is traced up to the royal stem, with such

such precision and consistency as shews it to have been once a matter of public concern. The later bards and senacchies could not have fabricated tables that should have stood the test of critical examination, as these will do; from whence I infer, that they have been a true transcript from *ancient records* then extant, but since destroyed." *

This summing up of the evidence, as I may fairly call it, by bishop Barnard; sanctions me in the belief, that the cause I have been pleading is just. But, similar instances, from similar premises, occur in the annals of almost every country upon earth. The Norwegians, says Mallet, who discovered and colonized Greenland, Iceland, and probably a part of America; who conquered the Orcades, the Hebrides, the Isle of Man, many provinces in England, in Scotland, and in Ireland; and particularly, that part of France which still bears their name; who were the terror of Europe;—these very Norwegians, hold out an instructive warning to mankind. "Chretien II." says he, "gouverné par des maximes & des conseils sanguinaires, détruisit une grande partie des familles nobles. Les temps qui suivirent ne furent pas moins

* Transact. Royal Ir. Acad. 1787.

moins contraires à la noblesse, quoiqu'elle n'eût plus à souffrir ses grandes calamités. Le sénat de Danemarck, anéantit celui de Norvège; traita ce royaume comme une province conquise, & le gouverna avec un empire absolu. Sous un semblable régime la noblesse Norvégienne ne put éviter de tomber dans l'indigence: elle vendit d'abord pour subsister, une partie de ses terres, & n'eût bientôt plus d'autres ressources que d'en cultiver le reste de ses propres mains. Telle est aujourd'hui la condition de presque tout ce qui reste des familles autrefois les plus illustres, & les plus puissantes. Leurs descendants conservent encore à côté des instruments du labourage qui les font vivre les armoiries, & les généalogies qui les consolent."

Was not this also the case on the establishment of the seven Saxon kingdoms in England? The unfortunate Britons having been exhausted by continual wars, and even worn out by their own victories, were reluctantly compelled to forsake the open, and more fertile parts of the country. All the vestiges of Roman luxury, were now almost totally destroyed by the conquerors. "The few natives, who were not either massacred, or expelled their habitations, were reduced to the most abject slavery, and em-

employed in cultivating those grounds for their new masters, which they once prided themselves in, as their own. Nay, the lower classes of people were bought and sold with the farms, and were reckoned of no more account than the herds of the field." *

Thus, which way soever we turn our footsteps, we meet with nothing but revolutions. The pages of all history, are little more than the chronicles of degradation on the one side, and of exaltation on the other.

* History of England.

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LETTER LXXX.

TO the Scythians, or Goths, whom we parted with on the continent, we are now again to return. They will not, after what we have already said, detain us long. The learned Rudbeck of Sweden, whom imagination favoured as much as erudition, speaks of Sweden as the Atalantis of Plato. He makes no doubt but Japhet himself came thither with his whole family; and he undertakes to prove a Scandinavian expedition under the direction of Hercules, in one of the remotest ages of the world. We have already had occasion to observe the destructive torrent, which, rushing from the North, spread itself in almost imperceptible ramifications over every part of Europe. In the field, the Teutonic race displayed an undaunted intrepidity, and a discipline and perseverance, which merited the approbation even of the Romans. In their maritime expeditions, they were bold and adventurous. We cannot

read the history of the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, without observing with surprize, the sea covered with their vessels. During the space of two hundred years, they almost incessantly ravaged England; they often invaded Scotland and Ireland, and made incursions on the coasts of Livonia, Courland, and Pomerania. All Europe, in short, was a prey to their depredations. No place escaped their fury; nor was any people left unsubdued within the wide circle of their sanguinary visitations.

In the history of Denmark, we find mention of a fleet of seven hundred ships; some of them were capable of carrying a hundred, or a hundred and twenty men. With these they made great and daring enterprizes. The Norwegians, have accounts not only of the discovery, but of their having settlements in America, or Vinland, as they then called it from its spontaneous vines, centuries before Columbus was born.* Our own Alfred, in the ninth century, had an attempt made to discover a north-east passage to the East Indies. The relation of this voyage, written in the Saxon language by Alfred himself, is happily preserved†. In the same tract, the king also gives us the report of an Anglo-Saxon, whom

* Mallet's North. Antiq.

† Cotton Library.

whom he had sent to explore the Baltic. Facts like these, speak volumes. They would lead one naturally to suppose, that though conquest has perhaps never appeared more dreadful and destructive than in the hands of the northern nations, yet that their expeditions were not always confined to piratical devastation. A life of danger and fatigue fortifies the strength, and animates the courage of the soldier. But in their turn, more peaceable propensities have likewise their ascendancy : and thus, while fertile provinces irresistibly attract, the tranquility of their abodes ultimately fix, the choice of tribes, who are in the search of settlement. The Gothic nations, entertained opinions, very different from ours, of national justice. Their laws, for the most part, like those of the Lacedemonians, seemed to know no other virtues than those of a military nature, and no other crimes than those of cowardice. War they looked upon as a real act of justice, and esteemed force an incontestible title over the weak ; a visible mark, that God had intended to subject them to the strong. They had no doubt but the intentions of the Divinity had been to establish the same dependence among men, as among inferior animals ; and setting out from the principle of the inequality of men, as our modern civilians do from that of their equality, they inferred that the

weak had no right to what they could not defend. And which, after all, let me ask, is worse ; to act and think as they did ; or, like the moderns, with better principles, to act as ill ? Valour, says a German warrior, in Tacitus, is the only proper good of men ; the gods range themselves on the side of the strongest.

I should wander from my purpose, were I to enumerate all the enterprizes of the inhabitants of the north. The causes which render nations hostile or friendly, are neither abstruse nor complicated ; nor does it require any depth of metaphysical subtlety to discover, what often confounds men's ideas of right and wrong. The Goths and Vandals, who made so great a figure in Europe, originally possessed a part of that immense country, which lies along the Baltic and the Northern ocean. The Angles, from whom the majority of the English derive their blood, and the whole their name, were one of the states, which the Romans comprehended under the general name of Vandals. Tacitus, has had the good fortune to dignify his account of the Germans, with the first mention of a nation, which has been decreed to make such an illustrious figure in the world.

“ *Ariones & Angli, & Varini, fluminibus & sylvis.*
muni-

muniantur." The Saxons, derived their origin from the same source with the Angles.

I have already mentioned that the Britons, unable to defend themselves from the northern inhabitants of their isle, and from the Scots, were forced to seek assistance from the Danes and Saxons, their allies. How they were betrayed, belongs properly to the province of history. We are told, however, that the Angles, in particular, or Danes, left their own country totally deserted.* Nor could it have been otherwise, if we recollect, that they did not so much conquer the Britons, as extirpate and expel them; and that they entirely new peopled three-fourths of the island. That they suffered few or none of the old inhabitants to remain among them, appears from their adopting scarcely any part of their customs, laws, or language; hardly retaining so much as their names of places. All which they insensibly would have done, more or less, had the conquered Britons remained, though in the lowest state of servitude. For it is always seen, that the conquerors gradually assume the language and manners of the conquered, when the latter are most numerous, though never so much depressed, provided they intermix. Thus, the

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* Chronic. Saxona.

Norwegians under Rollo, when they had conquered Normandy, quickly imbibed the French manners and language: thus, the same Normans, when, about two centuries after, they conquered England, in vain endeavoured to make their Norman-French the national language, and to establish the Norman laws; in the course of one or two reigns, the laws, manners, and speech of the English had gradually recovered the superiority, and were adopted by the conquerors themselves, and their descendants.

But, these were all a subsequent people. The movements from the north, were of a very early date. The Belgæ, are said to have passed into Britain 300 years before Christ; and the Picts, into Caledonia about the same time. Among all these Northern hordes, indisputable traces of Oriental usages are to be found: and this we have accounted for, on the great probability of their having been originally enlightened from the east. Odin's followers, as probably the last comers, imported abundantly from the east into Scandinavia. Alfred, in his Saxon account of the Northern seas, constantly calls these nations the Orientals. * Rome had reckoned from her foundation, 640 years, when the arms of the Cimbri, a Scythiæ

* Spelman.

Scythiac people, were first seen among them. "From that time to the present," says Tacitus, "two hundred and six years more have elapsed : so long have we been in conquering Germany. And in the course of so tedious a war, what various losses have been sustained by each party ! No nation hath given us more alarms ; neither the Samnites, the Carthaginians, the Spaniards, the Gauls, nor even the Parthians : so much less vigor hath the despotic power of Arsaces had, than the liberty of the Germans. For, except the defeat of Crassus, what hath the conquered and prostrate East to oppose to the current of our success ? Whereas, the Germans have taken or defeated five generals of the republic, who commanded so many consular armies. They cut off Varus, and three legions from Augustus himself. Nor was that advantage obtained with impunity, which Marius gained over them in Italy ; the divine Julius in Gaul ; and Drusus, Tiberius, and Germanicus in their own country. And even presently after this, the tremendous threats of Caligula became the object of their sport. A respite followed ; till profiting by our discord and civil wars, they attacked our legions in their winter quarters, and even undertook the conquest of Gaul. We have since driven them back beyond the Rhine : but, in these latter times, our

victories over them have been less real than the pomp of our triumphs. If this people cannot be brought to love us, at least, may the gods be propitious, and may they always hate each other; since in the present declining fates of the empire, fortune can grant us no greater favour, than the dissensions of our enemies!"*

Such was the opinion entertained of the German and Northern nations, by the people who conquered the rest of the world. Such, according to the confession of Tacitus, was that martial courage, that ardor, that constancy in defending, and avenging their liberties, which so early threatened the power of Rome, and in a few ages afterwards overturned it. Tacitus, in this compendious narrative of ancient Germany, comprehends under the same name all Scandinavia; and therefore whatever he says of the one, equally regards the other.† Their kings, they chose for their noble birth; their leaders, or generals, for their personal valour: *reges ex nobilitate, duces ex virtute sumunt*. In battle, it would have been a disgrace to the chief to have been excelled in courage by any of his followers: a disgrace to the followers, not to have equalled their chief. Should he have perished, they would

* Tacitus Germ. † Mallet.

would have been exposed to the highest infamy through life. The chiefs fought for victory: the followers for their chief. * And here we may at once perceive, the broad rudiments of vassalage, and feudal tenure.

Animosities and battles are subjects not worthy of commemoration. War, in its fairest form, implies a perpetual violation of humanity and justice. The records of man slaughtering man, are as contemptible as the records of dog howling against dog. From man, indeed, irreparable mischief often results; and the labours of a thousand years may be inadequate to the ravages of a single day. The progress and improvement of society, on the contrary, is a chronicle of inestimable value. It is delightful to see, even in those rude swarms of Germans and Scandinavians, a troop of savage warriors, who seemed only born for pillage and destruction, at last, changed into a sensible and free people; impregnating their institutions with a spirit of order and equality; and rearing that bud, which was afterwards to blossom, and expand throughout Europe. In this memorable æra, we can trace the first link of a new chain of events; we can see the laws spring forth, and the manners and principles, which have ever since

* Tacitus.

since governed so many celebrated nations, whose superiority of genius, at least for the moment, has apparently called them forth to determine the fate of almost all the rest of the world,

I am well aware, it has been the fashion to decry the Goths. But, what subject, even though the most sacred, has not been decried? I cannot, indeed, suppose the people of this island, for instance, during their bondage, to have been as refined and as happy, as they are now. I can easily picture to myself a wonderful alteration. All those great tracts of land, which lay untilled, on account of the inroads, or the feuds and discords that raged with perpetual violence, I now behold cultivated and smiling with plenty. Instead of the castles, which every baron was compelled to erect for the defence of his family, and where he lived in the fierceness of solitary pride, among needy dependents, oppressed by the abuse of feudal prerogative; my eyes are charmed with elegant country seats, adorned with fine plantations, and beautiful gardens; while happy villages, or gay towns, are rising about them, and enlivening the prospect, with every image of rural wealth: on our coasts, trading cities, full of new manufactures; in our ports and harbours, innumerable ships, for the sole purpose of commerce;
but

but above all, that improvement in the minds and faculties of men, which raise them to a rank, at least equal, if not superior, to the most celebrated of the Greeks and Romans!

Notwithstanding all this, however, and though it be admitted, that the real merit of any object is enhanced by the darkness of the surrounding medium through which it emerges, it will not be denied, that while the greatness and simplicity of those manners, which the conquerors of Rome brought with them from their woods, continued to animate their posterity, the feudal association was, for the days in which it reigned, noble in its principle, and useful in its practice. The lord and the vassal were linked to each other in the closest connection of attachment, gratitude, and affection. At the same time, it must be confessed, that if in one period, it tended to encourage liberty and happiness; in another, it instigated rapacity and savageness. Prosperity and vigour attended the feudal association in its youth; its maturity was marked with peevishness and infirmities. The compact at last broke; and then came all the miseries of reciprocal usurpation,

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The ancient inhabitants of Germany and Scandinavia, with many brilliant, had many hideous features. Thus, the laws of the Saxons, as regulated by Charlemagne, and published by Leibnitz,* fix the composition for the murder of a grandee, or a prince, at 3l. sterling; and the same for every wound, that deprived him of his hearing, sight, or use of his limbs. But, if this injury were done to a freeman, and not to a noble, the composition was only five shillings. At the same time, the murder of a slave was rated but at fifteen pence, which was precisely the price of a simple blow, that produced neither swelling nor blackness, if given to a prince or a noble. Nearly the same proportions were observed by the laws of the Angles. Outrages against the fair sex, and against modesty, also, were valued with a degree of exactness, of which one would not have thought matters of that nature susceptible. The laws of these people, says Montesquieu, judged of insults offered to men, by the size of the wounds, nor did they shew more refinement as to the offences committed against women: so that they seem to have measured injuries, as one measures figures in geometry,

Yet,

* Rer. Brunswic.

Yet, though damsels of distinction, and young maidens in particular, were commonly secured from the bold warriors who rambled about in search of adventures, in fortresses and rude castles, situated on the summits of rocks, and rendered inaccessible by thick mishapen walls, called *serpeuts* or *dragons*—it was here that chivalry commenced. Fiefs and chivalry were mutually to act upon one another. The feudal association, was to direct and to foster chivalry; and from chivalry, it was to receive a support and lustre. They were plants, which were destined to take root about the same period, and to sympathize in their growth, and in their decline. The seeds of them the Goth had gathered in his forest; and to whatever soil or climate his fortune was to carry him, there he was to scatter them with profusion.*

Women were of high importance in early times. The German women attended to public affairs; and as they debated in the days of Tacitus, in the assemblies of their tribes, so they afterwards appeared in the Gothic parliaments. Arms, gallantry, and devotion, (for to love God, and the ladies, was the first lesson of chivalry) acted with uncommon force among
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* Dr. Stuart.

the Germans. Religion mingled with war, and piety with love; and hence their splendid and heroic contentions for the palm of valour, and the prize of beauty. In the midst of fierceness and independency, gallantry, and the point of honour, grew and prospered. "Hi," says Tacitus, "cuique sanctissimi testes, hi maximi laudatores."

By all the Scandinavians, in particular, women were held in high consideration. They believed, that there was something sacred in their character, and that they had a foresight of futurity: for this reason, their councils were always respected, and their opinions regarded.* Strabo relates, that the Cimbri were accompanied by venerable and hoary-headed prophetesses, apparelled in long linen robes, most splendidly white. The Germans were always attended by their wives, even in their most distant expeditions. To the female sex belonged the study of simples, and the art of healing. In the chronicles of the North, we find the matrons, and the young women, always employed in dressing the wounds of their husbands or lovers. Tacitus says beautifully, "Ad matres,

* Tacitus.

ad conjuges, vulnera ferunt: nec illæ numerare aut exsugere plagas pavent: cibosque & hortamina pugnantibus gestant."

The resolution of the women of the North, was as dauntless as the courage of the men. "Her soul was resolved, and the tear was dried from her wildly-looking eye. A troubled joy rose on her mind, like the red path of the lightning on a stormy cloud. Yet, why did she not pass away in secret like the flower of the rock, which lifts its head unseen, and strews to the wind its withered leaves?"* Yet, it must not be fancied, the German women were deficient in gentleness. An high, independent spirit, is not inconsistent with the softer passions. Tacitus, with his usual energy, thus expresses the distinctive characters of the sexes in Germany. "Lamenta ac lacrymos citò, dolorem & tristitiam tarde ponunt. Feminis lugere honestum est; viris, meminisse.†

One principal source, however, whence the renowned system of chivalry was to arise, was the current belief, among Celts, as well as Goths, that victory always attends the just.
The

* Ossian.

† De Mor. Germ.

The love that God bears to truth and justice, they conceived, would lead, at all times, though even by supernatural means, to a fair and honourable termination. On this principle, also, was engrafted their reliance on divinations, in duels, &c. What they could not of themselves know, God, they supposed, might graciously be pleased to develope. Decisions of such a kind could not but be infallible. Herodotus tells us, duels were, on all occasions, common among the Scythians. In the flight, and the chirping of birds, they, in their auspices, likewise, recognized an evidence more than natural; in the entrails of animals, they, in their aruspices, found as unequivocal a testimony. At the obsequies of the father of Scipio Africanus, numbers of persons of distinction, of the Celtic nations, honoured the solemnity by personal combat. Among others, some who, not being able to terminate certain controversies at law, agreed to put the issue to the fate of arms.* Attila, about to raise the siege of Aquilea, seeing a flock of storks flying from the city, conceived it a good omen, recommended the attack, and took the place.† But, has not enlightened Christendom had its *sortes apostolorum*, and its *sortes*

* Livy.

† Procopius.

sortes virgilianæ; and which were the weakest, or the least superstitious?

The system of chivalry, indeed, when completely formed, proceeded on almost a kind of devotion to the female sex. In the early and traditionary history of the Greeks and the Romans, the outrages committed on women, were assigned as the most frequent occasions of war. "What wonder," says the old Priam, when Helen appeared, "that nations should contend for the possession of so much beauty?" When piracy, and a fondness for seeking adventures, exposed weakness to continual and unexpected attacks, the women, especially those of celebrated beauty, stood in want sometimes of deliverers, and almost always of defenders. Every young hero, would pant after such occupation. What so capable of inflaming the youthful mind with emulation, with courage, and intrepidity? Beside, the character of the Northern women themselves left the men no other less glorious means of gaining their hearts. Naturally chaste and proud, there was no other way but this to win their love. Educated under the influence of the same sentiments concerning honour as the men, they were early taught to despise those who spent their days in indolence

and supine obscurity: nor could they acknowledge any merit, but that of the high-minded, and the brave, nor be approached in any other accents, than those of gentleness and respect.

This was still more striking, when contrasted with Roman manners. Among the Scythiac tribes, not only vestal, but conjugal purity was preserved with unconquerable pertinacity. We read of no divorces; we read of none of those enemies to domestic felicity, separations. The matron who, in five years, could submit to the embraces of eight husbands,* must have ceased to reverence virtue in her own person. Jerom saw, at Rome, a triumphant husband bury his twenty-first wife, who had, in her turn, interred twenty-two of his less fortunate predecessors. The tale of ten husbands in a month,† cannot but be an extravagancy. Disregard to decency, always bespeaks ill-regulated minds. We do not see any thing of this, in the conduct of the women of ancient Germany. Neither can I admit there was a cold and unconquerable chastity, set up by the Gothic ladies, as an idol to be worshipped in the toils, the sufferings, and the combats of the hero and the lover.

* Juvenal.

† Martial.

lover. On the contrary, their affections were lively, and though pure and dignified, disinterested and sincere; and hence that polite gallantry, so peculiarly observable in the European character, which adds a double relish to the most pleasing of all social bands; which unites the lasting charms of sentiment, regard, and friendship, with the fleeting fire of love; and which cherishes and unfolds sensibility, that most choice gift of nature, without which, neither decorum, propriety, friendship, nor true generosity, can exist.

Chivalry annihilated the barbarity of the ancients. The conqueror displayed a demeanor, complacent and gentle, disarming envy by modesty, and enhancing greatness by generous sympathy, and magnanimous condescension.* These manners, so lofty and so romantic; for ages gave a splendor to Europe, unequalled in the annals of mankind. The spirit of humanity, which distinguishes modern times in the periods of war, as well as of peace; the gallantry which prevails in conversation and private intercourse; the point of honour, which corrects the violence of the passions, by improving

* Favine.

our sense of propriety and decorum, and which, by teaching us to consider the importance of others, makes us value our own; these circumstances arose out of chivalry, and discriminate the modern, from the ancient world. *

In the records of British chivalry, Wales we always find given as its favourite theatre. Its connection with Armorica, made it peculiarly so; and hence it is, that so many of the fictions, which occur in the early French romances, are also literally found in the tales and chronicles of the elder Welsh bards. † Have not Ossian's heroes all the gallantry and generosity of more modern knights, even untainted with their extravagance? Have not his love scenes, also, a native tenderness, unrivalled in the annals of virtuous simplicity and affection? "The daughter of the snow overheard, and left the hall of her secret sigh. She came in all her beauty; like the moon from the cloud of the east. Loveliness was around her as light. Her steps were like the music of songs. She saw the youth, and loved him. He was the stolen sigh of her soul. Her blue eyes rolled on him in secret; and she blest the chief of Morven." Malvina's lamentation over

Oscar,

* Stuart.

† Mem. Anc. Chiv.

Oscar, is exquisitely tender. "I was a lovely tree in thy presence, Oscar! with all my branches round me. But, thy death came, like a blast from the desert, and laid my green head low. The spring returned with its showers; but, no leaf of mine arose."

The women of Germany, and, indeed, of all the Scythiac nations, as I have already noticed, attended their husbands to the field. And here, therefore, in all probability, we are to trace the Amazons of the ancient world. The Amazons are placed, by ancient geographers, in the country now occupied by the Circassians.* The Circassian women participated in the general character of the nation; they took pride in the courage of their husbands. They attended them to battle. It is related, that the Romans, after a contest with the Huns, found among the slain, the bodies of their women.† After the engagement that Pompey had with the Albani, there were found several suits of armour belonging to the Amazons.‡ The most wonderful part of the story, however, is the mysterious commerce of the Amazons with their temporary husbands, and the amputation performed on
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* Strabo.

† Procopius,

‡ Zonaras,

their breasts; which last circumstance was probably, however, invented by the Greek etymologists, in order to explain the name of the nation. The name is less absurdly to be derived from the Circassian word *Maza*, the moon, which is reported to have been the favourite deity of the mountaineers of Caucasus, than from the Greek word *Μαζον*, which signifies a woman's breast. Their casual intercourse with their husbands, must then have originated in the custom peculiar to themselves, and which even exists at this day, by which husbands are prohibited, under pain of infamy, from publicly conversing with their wives; so that the sexes are, as it were, divided into two distinct communities.*

“ My fathers,” replied the youthful bleeding warrior, “ were of the race of the mighty, but they shall not be sad; for my fame is departed like morning mist. But thou mayest behold yon mossy towers. There my brother dwells. He is renowned in battle: give him this glittering helm. The helmet fell from the hand of Gaul. It was the wounded Oithona! She had armed in the cave, and came in search of death. She trembled for her warrior. But, her arm could

* Caucasian Nations.

could not lift the spear. Her white breast never rose beneath a mail. But, she came by night to the hall. She armed her lovely form in steel: the steel of a young warrior, who fell in the first of his battles."—"Son of Ossian's harps, my soul is darkly sad. I behold the arms of Cathmol, which he raised in war. Take the mail of Cathlin, place it high in Selma's hall; that thou mayest remember the hapless in thy distant land. From white breasts, descended the mail. It was the soft-handed daughter of Cathmol," *

The German adored an invisible Being, to whom he ascribed infinite knowledge, justice, and power. "Regnator omnium Deus, cetera subjecta atque parentia." † At the same time, he conceived the elements, and the visible parts of nature, to be the residence of subordinate divinities. Every tree, and every fountain had its genius; the air, the woods, the water, had their spirits. In short, every thing common, as well as singular, was imputed to supernatural agents; and hence arose elves, fairies, sprites, magicians, dwarfs, enchanter, and giants; to-

* Ossian.

† Tacitus.

gether with all the wonders and extravagances of the old romance. *

The chronicles of chivalry may be derived, in a lineal descent, from the ancient historical songs of the Gothic bards and Scalds. Many of these songs are still preserved in the North, which exhibit all the seeds of chivalry, before it became a solemn institution. Even the common arbitrary fictions of romance were most of them familiar to the ancient Scalds of the North, long before the time of the crusades. † And the case was the same, even in regard to more weighty matters. Many writers, indeed, have looked upon the Saxon period as too remote, and as affording a prospect too barren and rude, to deserve any particular examination: but, it ought to be considered, that the foundations even of such a fabric as the British constitution, were laid in that early period. ‡

In the northern *Sagas*, are to be traced the principles of the French and English romances of chivalry. The ideas of chivalry, the appendage, and the subject of romance, subsisted among the Goths. The pictures of ancient man-

* Du Cange. † Dr. Percy. ‡ Proff. Millar.

manners; presented by these early poets, strongly interest the imagination: especially, as having the same kind of merit with the pictures of manners in Homer, that of being founded in truth and reality, and actually painted from the life. To talk of the grossness and absurdity of such manners, is little to the purpose; the poet is only concerned in the justness of the representation. These bards did not invent facts, so much as fables. Had they done this, the notoriety of the deception would be glaring. A like objection might be made to Homer. When Christianity began, Heathenism was to be destroyed, and Homer appeared the father of it. He became involved, therefore, deeply in the question; and not with the honour which hitherto attended him, but as a criminal, who had drawn the world into error. The reading him was discouraged.* He was rejected as the grand master of fable. But, the dispute of faith being over, and ancient learning having reassumed its dignity, Homer regained his proper place in the esteem of mankind; and remains confessedly a mighty genius, not transcended by any which have since arisen; the prince, as well as the father of poetry;†

* St. Aug. Confess,

† Pope.

Ancient poems, such as the Sagas, the Wars of Fingal, &c. are in the group, to be considered as the efforts of strong imagination, unacquainted with selection and arrangement of images. They are rudely thrown on the canvas, without order or art. They are a mixture of the sublime with hyperbole, and the familiar with extravagancy. Others, again, are in critical exactitude and beauty, almost beyond the powers of imitation. What more exquisite in descriptive poetry, than Ossian's illustrations of the music of the bards? It is compared to the calm shower of spring; to the dews of the morning, on the hill of the roes. "He feared to stretch his sword to the bards, though his soul was dark. Loose the bards, said his brother, they are the sons of other times. Their voice shall be heard in other ages, when the kings of Temora have failed. Their soft sounds spread along the wood, and the silent valleys of night rejoice."

With the solemn harp's harmonious sound, Achilles soothes his angry soul, and sings the immortal deeds of heroes and of kings.* Two Scythians stood before the couch of Attila, and recited the verses they had composed, to celebrate

* Homer.

brate his valour and his victories. A profound silence prevailed in the hall; and the attention of the guests was captivated by the vocal harmony, which revived and perpetuated the memory of their own exploits: a martial ardour flashed from the eyes of the warriors, who were impatient for battle; and the tears of the old men expressed their generous despair, that they could no longer partake the danger and glory of the field.*

Barbarous times, it is true, have produced very few tolerable historians; but, all ages indiscriminately, and all countries, where military merit has shone with splendour, have produced bards, famous in their generation. Of all monuments, that reared by the muse of a genuine poet, is most expressive, most durable, and consequently, most to be desired. The faintest traces of the magnificent Babylon, cannot now be investigated. The famous Egyptian pyramids, though still extant, have not been able to preserve the names of the vain monarchs by whom they were constructed. But the structures which Homer has built, and the monuments which Virgil has raised to the

* Gibbon.

memory of illustrious men, will perish only with the world.

The talents of old, however, among the Germans, which had been wont to record the deeds of valour, and the achievements of war, were, on the revival of letters, and the consequent extinction of bards, devoted to the fair. In every country of Europe, the poet, or the *troubadour*, consecrated to them his homage and his songs. And thus, to the fashions of gallantry the rise of literature is to be ascribed.* Some writers, indeed, have erroneously imagined, that not only romance, but even chivalry itself was owing to the crusades. But, the fact is, that if chivalry had not been in existence, the crusades could not have been carried into execution. The knight only altered the object of his superstition. To defend Christianity, with his sword and his life, became a sacred vow, to which he was ambitious to submit. Instead of a lover, he became a saint; and in lieu of the smiles of a mistress, he piously looked for the smiles of heaven.

The word romance, itself, is not of very ancient usage. The Latin language ceased to be spoken

* Dr. Stuart

spoken in France about the ninth century; and was succeeded by what was called the Romance Tongue; a mixture of Frankish and bad Latin. Hence the first poems in that language are called *Romans*, or *Romandis*.*

* Warton.

LET-

LETTER LXXXI.

WE are now to turn away from days of gallantry and hardihood, when every thought, though proud, was masculine; when the knight was led forth, not as to a review, but, as to a battle; not adorned for parade, but execution; who would be tried by the sharpness of his blade, and not by its finery; who, in short, like the heroes of antiquity, would charge in iron, and would seem to despise all ornament, but intrinsic merit. To a much more peaceable subject, our enquiries now conduct us.

The ancient Germans, it is said, had not the use of letters, before their intercourse with the Romans: and the testimony of Tacitus is quoted as decisive on the subject: "*Literarum secreta viri pariter ac fæminæ ignorant.*" Tacitus is undeniably an authority of high consideration. But, as we have already seen, that Greece, Italy, and the south of Europe, received

ed letters from the Pelasgian, or Southern Scythians, it may not at least be unworthy of enquiry, what causes could have prevented the Germans and Scandinavians, from receiving letters from the Northern Scythians. Especially, as we are told, the Goths brought with them, into their European abodes, many useful arts, particularly the knowledge of letters, which Odin is even said to have invented. *

The origin of the Grecian language, sciences, and religion, we have traced on a former occasion, to Scythia: "Satis certum ex his colligi potest linguam, ut gentem Hellenicam, a septentrione & Scythia originem traxisse, non a meredie. Inde literæ Græcorum, inde Musæ Pierides, inde sacrorum initia." † A late ingenious antiquary, also, endeavours to prove, that the Goths were descended from the Thracians; and that the Greeks and Thracians, were only different clans of the same people. Odin, we have already attended from his mountains of Scythia into Scandinavia. The Icelandic chronicles paint him as the most persuasive of men. They tell us, nothing could resist the force of his words; and that he was not only a great

* Ol. Worm.

† Salmasius.

poet, but, that he taught the art of poesy to the Scandinavians. He was also the inventor of the Runic characters, which so long prevailed among that people. The same chronicles add, he knew how to sing airs so tender and melodious, that the very plains and mountains would open and expand with delight; and that the ghosts, attracted by the sweetness of his songs, would leave their infernal caverns, and stand motionless about him. He is even represented as descending into hell, and calling up thence a certain prophetess, another Eurydice.

In travelling in Denmark and Norway, the antiquary frequently meets with large stones of different forms, engraven with the Runic character. In England and Scotland, the like inscriptions have been discovered.* The few, who have endeavoured to decypher these inscriptions, have found them to be, for the most part, epitaphs in the ancient Icelandic language, and most of them of a date anterior to the introduction of Christianity. In Tartary, in the very heart of the deserts, where Christianity never penetrated, we also are told of inscriptions in the Runic character. But, the ancient Edda,

* Hicke's Thesaur. Ling. Sept,

Edda gives us clearly to understand, that Odin caused the knowledge of letters to be regarded as the art of magic, the art of working miracles. He is made to say, "Do you know how to engrave Runic characters? How to explain them? How to procure them? How to prove their virtue?"

Of these there were *Runes* to procure victory; to preserve from poison; to relieve women in labour; to cure bodily diseases; to dispel evil thoughts from the mind; to dissipate melancholy, and to soften the severity of a cruel mistress. The Scandinavians employed nearly the same characters for all these different purposes; but they varied the order and combination of the letters: they wrote them either from right to left, or from top to bottom, or in the form of a circle, or contrary to the course of the sun. This Runic, the learned Celsus was of opinion, was nothing more than the Roman alphabet, with the curve changed into straight lines for the ease of engraving on hard stones and wood. Mr. Gibbon likewise says, "the oldest Runic inscriptions are supposed to be of the third century; and the most ancient writer, who mentions the Runic characters, is Venantius Fortunatus,

who lived towards the end of the sixth century.
Barbara fraxineis pingatur Runa Tabellis.

“There is a language,” says Lord Monboddo,*
 “from the name of which we should expect
 nothing but rudeness and barbarity, and yet it
 is a great work of art, such as may be compared
 even to the Greek, and in many respects is pre-
 ferable to the Latin. The language I mean is
 the Gothic, the parent of all the different dia-
 lects of the Teutonic, such as the German, the
 Dutch, Swedish, Danish, Icelandish, and of the
 English among the rest. It is a complete lan-
 guage in itself, having its roots all of its own
 growth, from which it forms the rest of its
 words by derivation and composition. It has all
 the several parts of speech distinguished from
 one another, and among others, the adjective of
 three genders. It forms the cases of its nouns by
 flexion, and has five declensions as well as the
 Latin; in all which there are four cases distin-
 guished from one another by the difference of
 termination, namely, the nominative, genitive,
 dative, and accusative. It has an article of three
 genders, as the Greek has, and also a dual num-
 ber in the two first pronouns, and in the verbs.
 These have four moods, as well as the Latin
 verbs,

* Origin and Progress of Language.

verbs, formed by the change of termination, and three tenses, with the varieties of persons and numbers, all formed in the same way. And, lastly, it has prepositions, conjunctions, and a regular syntax." *

These Goths, and in general all the conquerors of the Roman empire, came, as I have often mentioned, from Scythia, that is, the north east parts of Europe, and north west of Asia, comprehending all the country now known by the name of Tartary, and a considerable part of Muscovy and Siberia. It is a vulgar error, that they were originally northern nations. The fact is, they all came from the east, which is the true *Officina Gentium*, not the north. Now these very people, in their other ramifications, we have seen a lettered people. Neither can I very readily connect the existence of an accurate and grammatically constructed language with a total ignorance of the first elements of literature. I am far from believing the use of letters to have been generally known. But even in the tempests which then so fiercely raged, might not some little bark have floated down the surface, and

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* Maning's Grammar, and Lye's Saxon and Gothic Dictionary.

preserved some trifling fragments of more perfect erudition?

Nations are not so tenacious of their customs and manners, as they are of their aboriginal tongues. Conquest may confine the bounds of a language; commerce may corrupt, or may improve it; new inventions, by introducing new words, may bring the old into disuse; a change in the mode of thinking may alter the idiom; but it is never to be extirpated, except by the extirpation of those who use it. It retires from successful invasion among rocks and deserts; it subsists with the remains of a people; even mountains and rivers in part retain it, when the people are no more. The Romans, who endeavoured to make their language universal through the whole *orbis Romanus*, yet could not at all times succeed. They conquered Greece, but they did not make their language triumph there, as well as their arms.

It is said, that under the reign of the emperor Valens, in the year 369, Ulphilas, bishop of those Goths who were settled in Mæsia and Thrace, translated the Bible into the Gothic language, and that he first taught these Mæso-Goths letters. A fragment of this identical ver-

sion of Ulphilas was many years ago discovered in the Abbey of Werden in Westphalia. In examining it, the letters were found to be in every respect dissimilar to the Runic character. Their numbers were likewise twenty-five, whereas the Runic were only sixteen, and it was formed, with slight variations, from the capitals of the Greek and Latin alphabet. This fragment, which is now preserved in the library of Upsal in Sweden, is known by the name of Codex Argenteus, the letters being all of silver, except the initials, which are of gold : and what is still more singular, these very letters appear, not to have been written with a pen, but to have been stamped, or imprinted on the vellum, with hot metal types, in the same manner as the backs of books are lettered. *

The Runic character thus might have had a being previous to the introduction of Christianity. Ulphilas also might have been entitled to the honour of inventing a new character, as he might not have chosen to employ, in so sacred a work as the translation of the Bible, the letters which the Goths had, in his eyes, rendered infamous by superstition. † Moreover, it is not the least impracticable method of instilling new

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principles

* Ihre.

† Dr. Percy.

principles, to introduce a new way of writing, and thereby to render the old method mysterious and unintelligible. Many instances of this occur in history. In a stone chest, discovered at Grenada in Spain, the acts of the council of Illiberis, held A. D. 304, were found, and in thorough preservation. They were written or engraved on plates of lead, in Gothic characters;* whereas, most other writings, during the continuance of the Gothic empire, were made in the Latin tongue, and in Latin characters.

The various alphabets of different nations are made by degrees, and from originals and causes which it is impossible to discover. One thing, however, is certain, that the fluctuations in the shape of alphabetical characters, have on certain occasions been formed by the fashion of the day. Towards the middle of the fifth century, Cyril was sent from Constantinople to preach the gospel to the Slavonian nations, who then inhabited Hungary, Bulgaria, Moravia, and Poland. He also, we are told, in the style of Ulphilas, invented, and communicated to the Slavonians a character, and a knowledge of letters. His alphabet, however, formed after the capitals of the Greek alphabet, consisted of thirty-nine letters,

The

* Gent. Mag. 1757.

The tribe of Sclavonians who were afterwards called Russians, when they quitted the shores of the Danube to found another empire, still further to the north, took this alphabet with them, but reduced it to its present number, thirty.* But might not this alphabet of St. Cyril have been rather an improvement upon an old Sclavonian character, than altogether an invention of his own? I ask the question, because I cannot conceive how the Sclavonians, with their various dialects, could have been altogether ignorant of letters. Their language, besides the countries I have mentioned, was that of Croatia, Carinthia, Carniola, Esclavonia, Borna, Servia, Albania, and Dalmatia. From Venice to Kamschatka, it was understood. At this hour they speak it in Istria, Silesia, Lusatia, Pomerania, Mecklenburg, and even to the frontiers of Holstein. Look at the map, and tell me if you can suppose, a people so situated, so closely bordering upon the Scythians, to have been ignorant of letters until the fifth century of Christ?

The Runic, however, of which we are speaking, is stubbornly denied to the Goths, though it is as like the Mæso-Gothic of Ulphilas, as it

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* Coxæ.

is like the Chinese. Tacitus is always produced in formal array, and he is known to have written, as I have already quoted, that both men and women among the Germans were equally ignorant of letters. But, may not Tacitus be, in this passage, misunderstood? Some, at least, who have been well acquainted with his style and manner, have considered what he has here said, as meaning, that both men and women were ignorant of what Roman men and women were not, the secret of writing letters of libertinism and dishonourable intrigue.* Moreover, is it clear that these words of Tacitus are not to be understood in a positive sense, as spoken of such Germans as lived in obscurity, or of the most ignorant of them; for he makes mention, but a little before, of certain tombs and monuments, on the confines of Germany and Rhætia, that had inscriptions on them in Greek letters?

A small degree of enquiry, however, into collateral matters, may enable us to do somewhat more than form conjectures on the literary character of the Germans and Scandinavians. In the future revolutions of ages, I can readily anticipate culture in the most disheartening soil; in the days that are past, I can retrospectively suppose

* L'Abbe Bletterie.

suppose ability to have flourished, where the sickly weeds of ignorance are now predominant. Thus, as the day will come when the wastes of Siberia, as well as the wildernesses of America, shall send forth poets, philosophers, and astronomers, capable of holding converse with the planetary worlds, so may it have happened in those desert corners, where not even a trace of civilization is now to be discerned.

Europe, in ancient days, possessed, besides what we have already discussed, five Pagan religions ; the Polytheism of Greece and Rome, the Druidical religion of the Celtic nations, the Polytheism of the Teutonic or Gothic nations, the Pagan religion of the Slavonians, and the low wretched superstitions of the more northern Laplanders, Fins, Greenlanders, &c. Of the Celts we have spoken at large. The Celtic odes of the Druids are for ever lost. We happily possess, however, the Runic Songs of the Gothic Scalds ; which, though they have nothing in common with the Druid odes, yet are truly valuable, as they unfold the system of the Gothic ancestors of the different nations of Europe.

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The ancient Icelandic mythology calls God the author of every thing that existeth ; the eternal, the ancient, the living and awful Being ; the Searcher into concealed things ; the Being that never changeth. It attributes to him an infinite power, a boundless knowledge, and an incorruptible justice. It forbad the Scandinavians to represent this divinity under any corporeal form. They were not even to think of confining him within the inclosure of walls, but were taught that it was only within woods, and consecrated forests, they could serve him with propriety and veneration. God, say they, is the universal father. He lives for ever. He formed the heaven, the earth, and the air. He also made man, and gave him a soul which shall live even after the body shall have mouldered away. The just shall dwell with him, in Gimle or Paradise ; but wicked men shall go to Hela or Death. *

The Germans and Scandinavians at first called the Divinity, Tis, Tuis, or Teut ; they afterwards accustomed themselves to call him by an appellative name, God, or Guodan, which signifies the good. This by degrees they changed into Odin, which the Anglo-Saxons pronounced Wodan.

• Edda.

Wodan. Teut, however, is not to be confounded with Thor, who was only the third principal deity of the Scandinavians, the most valiant of the sons of Odin. He is always represented armed with a mace or club, which he grasps invincibly, with gauntlets of iron. This is the God of the Gauls also, who was charged with the conduct of the atmosphere, and presided over the winds and tempests.* To him was consecrated the day Thorsday, or our Thursday. Nor is Tyr, tho' a warrior deity, to be confounded with Thor. From him comes Tyrday, or our Tuesday. He was the protector and champion of brave men.

The Edda reckons up twelve Gods, and as many Goddesses, to whom divine honours were due, and who, though they had all a certain authority, were nevertheless obliged to obey Odin. Brage, for instance, presided over eloquence and poetry. His wife, named Iduna, had the care of certain apples, which the Gods tasted when they found themselves grow old, and which had the power of instantly restoring them to youth. Heimdal was their porter. The Gods had made a bridge between heaven and earth; this bridge is the rain-bow. Heimdal was employed to watch

* *Cæsar. Comment.*

watch at one of the extremities of this bridge, lest the giants should make use of it to get into heaven. It was impossible to surprise him, for the Gods had given him the faculty of sleeping more lightly than a bird, and of discovering objects by day or night, further than the distance of a hundred leagues. He had also an ear so fine, that he could hear the very grass grow in the meadows, and the wool on the backs of the sheep.*

Loke was the evil principle of the Scandinavians. They, notwithstanding, ranked him among their Gods. The Edda calls him the calumniator of the Gods, the grand contriver of deceits and frauds, the reproach of Gods and men. He is beautiful in his figure, but his mind is evil, and his inclinations inconstant. No one renders him divine honours. He surpasses all mortals in the arts of perfidy and craft. Three monsters owe their birth to him, the wolf Fenris, the serpent Midgard, and Hela or Death. In his wars with the Gods he was discomfited. He was seized and shut up in a cavern, where he rages with such violence, that he is the cause of all our earthquakes. There
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* Edda, Mythol. 25.

he is to remain, till the end of the ages, and then he is, with the greats serpent, &c. to be slain.*

The principal deity, however, among the Scandinavians after Odin, was Frea, his wife. It was the opinion of all the Scythiac nations, of the ancient Syrians, and of the first inhabitants of Greece, that the Supreme Being, or celestial God, had united with the earth to produce the inferior divinities, man, and all other creatures. Upon this was founded that veneration they had for the earth, which they considered as a Goddess, and those honours which were paid to her. They called her Mother Earth, and the Mother of the Gods. The Phœnicians adored both these two principles, under the names of Tautes, and Astarte. They were called by the inhabitants of Greece and Italy, Saturn and Ops. Tacitus says, the Germans adore the Goddess Herthus, or earth. And this was the Frea of the Scandinavians, or Rhea of the Lydians, words differing only from different aspirations. Hence also comes the word frau, which signifies woman in the German language. †

This Frea became in the sequel the Goddess of Love and Debauchery, the impure Venus of the

* Mythol. 26.

† Mallet.

the north, doubtless because she passed for the principle of all fecundity, and for the mother of all existence. It was Frea that was addressed to obtain happy marriages. She dispensed pleasures, enjoyments, and delights. The Edda stiles her the most propitious of the Goddesses; and in imitation of the Venus of the Greeks, who lived in the most tender union with Mars, Frea went out to war with her gallant Odin, and divided with him the souls of the slain. She was also known under the name of Astagod, or the Goddess of Love, which is not very remote from that of Astarte; and that of Goya, which the ancient Greeks called the earth. She was sometimes, however, confounded with the moon, who was thought, like her, to have influence over the increase of the human species; for which reason the full moon was considered as the most favourable time for nuptials. The sixth day of the week was consecrated to Frea, and called Freytay, or our Friday.

The three superior divinities, to whom the great Temple of Upsal seems particularly to have been consecrated, were symbolically represented; first, Odin, holding a sword in his hand; next, Thor, at his left hand, with a crown upon his head, a sceptre in one hand, and a club in the other; sometimes

sometimes even pourtrayed in a chariot, drawn by two he goats, with a silver bridle, and his head surrounded with stars ; and lastly, Frea, standing at the left hand of Thor, with attributes characterizing the Goddess of Pleasure. These, however, are not to be considered as the trinity of the Scandinavians. The names of the trinity are different ; and I would mention them, but that they do not, in every point of view, appear to me to be a legitimate branch of the genuine mythology of Scandinavia.

The genii and fairies of the Scandinavians were of different characters, good and bad, as were the genii and spirits of the Persians. From these were derived the fables of Incubuses and Succubuses ; and that general opinion, that there were genii or sylphs of both sexes, who did not disdain the embraces of mortals. The elfs and weird sisters, or *parcæ*, are also taken notice of in the Scalds.* We have already seen, that their women foretold future events, uttered oracles, and maintained in pretension a strict commerce with the Divinity. Vola, or Folia, was probably the general name for all sybils of this kind ; and hence, perhaps, the reason why Horace calls his sybil Araminensis Folia. These names are likewise

* Keyser.

likewise connected with the idea of folly or madness. The word *Fol* bore the same meaning in the ancient Gothic, that it does in French, or English, and in almost all the languages of the north.* The poem of *Voluspa*, a word which signifies the oracle, or the prophecy of *Vola*, and is part of the most ancient *Edda*, is still in being.†

The Persians, together with their subordinate divinities, *genji*, or angels, (for every river, fountain, and grove, had its tutelary deity) acknowledged two eternal principles; the one good, *Oromases*; the other bad, *Arimanius*. Between these they placed a third, whom they called *Mithras*, or mediator. The *Mars* of the Thracians, so called by the Greeks; the *Mercury* of the Gauls, so called by the Romans; the *Hercules*, the *Thot*, the *Vodan*, *Wodin*, *Odin*, or *God*, were all one and the same, or attributes of the same being. Thus we read, “*Deo suo Vodana, quem Mercurium vocant.*”‡ *Herodotus* makes the Scythians adore *Jupiter Pappæus*, as the Supreme God, the father of men; and *Apia* the earth, his wife, the mother of men. This latter divinity, by the way, the Ephesians

* *Hickes. Thesau.*

† *Mallet.*

‡ *Vita St. Columb.*

Ephesians worshipped afterwards, under the figure of the Polimamma, or Diana of Ephesus.

Brought up in battle, and habituated to blood, the Scandinavians in course of time made their Gods as fierce and untractable as themselves. The supreme Gods of other nations are represented as favourable to the existence of the human species. The chief titles of Odin, however, were, Father of the Slain, the Lord of Graves. Their religion at first, indeed, was simple and pure; but, they fell into the common, and I am afraid inevitable mistake of the human mind, and carried the imperfections of their own nature into the idea they formed of the nature of the Deity. Hence those frightful pictures of the terrible and severe God, the father of slaughter, the God that carrieth desolation and fire; and hence their abominable repasts in Valhall, Odin's favourite place of residence.* But, were the Greek and Roman deities, let me ask, guided by much more equitable, I will not say less brutal principles?

The Scandinavians and Germans had three great religious festivals in the year. The first

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* Edda.

and most considerable, was celebrated at the winter solstice. They began their year with it ; it was named Iuul, and hence the old English Yeol, or Yule, for Christmas. This feast was celebrated to the honour of Thor ; and sacrifices, dances, nocturnal assemblies, and all the demonstrations of dissolute joy, were then authorised by general usage. These feasts answered to the Saturnalia of the Romans. In the early ages, the offerings on these and similar occasions were simple, and such as rustics could readily present. To Odin were offered horses, dogs, falcons, cocks, and fat bulls ; to Thor, fat oxen and horses ; and to Frea, the largest hog that could be procured. Unhappily, however, when the effusion of blood is once supposed capable of appeasing the anger, or conciliating the favour of the Gods, fear and anxiety soon lead men to apprehend, that the blood of animals is not sufficiently valuable for great purposes : and hence man is seen deliberately and religiously to murder man. Every ninth month the Scandinavians repeated a detestable ceremony of human sacrifices, which lasted nine days, on each of which they immolated nine of their fellow creatures. The altars of these tragedies were composed of large stones, which neither the ravages of time, nor the zeal of the first converts to Christianity, have been

been altogether able to destroy. Stonehenge was probably one of them. For the Britons, as well as all the Celts, Italians, Carthaginians, Phœnicians, and in short, all the nations we read of in Europe and Asia, lie under the opprobrium of the same abominable and bloody practice.

The legislators of the Scythians represented God himself as author of the laws, which they gave to their fellow citizens, The priests (who were often also the sovereigns, and sprang for the most part from the same family, like those of the Jews) persuaded the people that their family had God himself for its founder. Who then, in the language of the Edda, could refrain from trembling before holy men, who expounded the behests of the Supreme God. Thus, the Germans, so haughty, who thought themselves dishonoured if they had not revenge for the slightest offence, would with trembling submit to blows, and even death itself, from the hand of the Pontiff; “*Neque animadvertere, neque vincire, neque verberare nisi sacerdotibus permissum, non ducis jussu, sed velut Deo imperante.*”* The Goddess Frea was usually served by king’s daughters, who were called prophetesses and Goddesses, who pronounced oracles,

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devoted

* Tacitus.

devoted themselves to perpetual virginity, and kept up the sacred fire in her temple. *

All the ancient nations of Europe describe their origin with nearly the same circumstances. Tacitus says, the Germans celebrated a God born of the earth. This God had a son, who had three sons ; and these were the original ancestors of the three principal nations of Germany. Herodotus tells us, the founder of the Scythians had three sons. A tradition received by the Romans, according to Appian, said, that the Cyclop Polypheme had by Galatea, three sons, Celtus, Illyrius, and Gallus. Saturn, the father of Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto, might very well come from the same source ; as well as the three sons, whom Hesiod makes to spring from the marriage of Heaven and Earth, Coltus, Briareus, and Gyges. Whence the foundation of this extraordinary similitude ? Has it any common, or even derivative connexion with Shem, Ham, and Japhet ?

The Scythiac chaos, as given to us in the Icelandic mythology, has greatness and sublimity in the description : “ In the day spring of the ages there was neither sea, nor shore, nor refreshing

* Mallet.

freshing breezes. There was neither earth below, nor heaven above to be distinguished. The whole was only one vast abyss, without herb and without seeds. The sun had then no palace : the stars knew not their dwelling places ; the moon was ignorant of her power. Then there arose a luminous, burning, flaming world towards the south ; and from this world flowed incessantly, into the abyss that lay towards the north, torrents of sparkling fire. Thus was the abyss by little and little filled. But, there remained within it a light and immoveable air. Then a warm breath coming from the south, melted the vapours of the abyss, and formed of them living drops, whence was born the giant Ymer. While Ymer slept, a man and woman were formed from him. A general inundation afterwards happened, from the blood which ran from the wounds of Ymer when he was slain. Only one giant escaped, and he saved himself in a bark with all his family. Then a new world was formed. The earth was made round, and it was surrounded by the deep ocean. Out of bits of wood, a man and a woman were created. The eldest of the Gods gave them life and souls ; the second, motion and knowledge ; the third, the gift of speech, hearing, and sight, to which he added beauty and raiment. From this man

and this woman, named Askus and Embla, is descended the race of men who are permitted to inhabit the earth.*

The resemblance in the book of the pretended prophecy of Enoch, to the particulars contained in this mythological dogma of the Scandinavians, is extremely remarkable. The fables of Prometheus, Typhon, and Enceladus, have likewise a strong appearance of being derived from the same original. But the end of the world, the last day, is depicted with peculiar boldness in the Edda :

“ The giant Rymer arrives from the east, carried in a chariot ; the ocean swells ; the great serpent rolls himself furiously in the waters, and lifteth up the sea ; the eagle screams, and tears the dead bodies with his horrid beak ; the vessel of the Gods is set afloat. The vessel comes from the east ; the host of evil genii arrives by sea ; Loke is their pilot and director ; their furious squadron advances, escorted by the wolf Fenris ; Loke appears with them,

“ The black prince of the genii of fire issues forth from the south, surrounded with flames ;
the

• Edda.

the swords of the Gods beam forth rays like the sun ; the rocks are shaken, and fall to pieces ; the female giants wander about weeping ; men tread in crowds the paths of death ; the heaven is split asunder.

“ New grief for the Goddess who defends Odin ; for Odin advances to encounter Fenris, the snow-white slayer of Bela, against the black prince of the genii of fire. Soon is the spouse of Frea beaten down. Then runs Vidar, the illustrious son of Odin, to avenge the death of his father : he attacks the murderous monster, that monster born of a giant, and with his sword he pierces him to the heart.

“ The sun is darkened ; the sea overwhelms the earth ; the shining stars vanish out of heaven ; the fire furiously rages ; the ages draw to an end ; the flame ascending strikes the vault of heaven.”*

I will not detain you with a reference to the Old and the New Testament for passages, which you will, on recollection, find most extraordinarily apposite to what I have here quoted ; neither shall I go over the grounds taken also by

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* Dr. Percy.

the Stoics, particularly by Seneca, on the same subject. The field is uncommonly fertile, and at a more leisure moment, may not be unworthy of your deliberate attention. I am now urged to a conclusion.

The Scandinavians excelled as much in passive as in active resolution. The period granted them to live they were indifferent about ; they regarded with little concern, if not with disdain, that which is so much valued by the rest of mankind, a long and a healthy old age. Few of them awaited the distant period allotted by nature. Single combats or general engagements, the dangers and fatigues of the sea, together with the frequent practice of suicide, were so many passages ever open to conduct them to that glorious path, which they thought led to a happy futurity. The dreadful consequences of their sensibility to what they falsely called honour, extended even from private persons to a whole people. " The groans of the people spread over the hills ; they were like the thunder of the night when the cloud bursts on Cona, and a thousand ghosts shriek at once on the hollow wind : silence darkened the land around ; blasts sighed lonely on grassy tombs."*

After

* Ossian,

After every effort for the acquisition of glory, it was natural for the Scandinavian to devise means to perpetuate it. Accordingly the customs of their funeral ceremonies were peculiarly calculated for this purpose ; although before the arrival of Odin from Scythia, they did probably little more than lay the dead body with its arms under a small heap of earthen stones. “ I took a stone from the stream amidst the song of bards ; the blood of Fingal’s foes hung curdled in its ooze ; beneath I placed at intervals three bosses from the shields of foes, as rose or fell the sound of Ullin’s song ; Toscar laid a dagger in the earth, a mail of sounding steel ; we raised the mould around the stone, and bade it speak to other years.”*

Odin introduced into the north, however, new customs attended with more magnificence. In succeeding ages, the bodies were reduced to ashes, and after being collected together in an urn, were deposited under a small mount of earth. But, this practice was never quite universal. These two funeral ceremonies accordingly have distinguished two distinct æras, in the ancient northern history. The first was called the *age of fire*, and the second the *age of hills* ;

bills; which last prevailed till Christianity triumphed, and in our barrows and tumuli are to be observed all over England to this day: but, whether to be ascribed to our Gothic ancestors, the Saxons or Danes, or to the inhabitants of Celtic race, it is not easy to determine.

When a hero or chief fell gloriously in battle, his funeral obsequies were honoured with all possible splendour. His arms, his gold and silver, his war horse, his domestic attendants, and whatever else he held most dear, were placed with him on the pile. His dependants and friends frequently made it a point to die with their leader, in order to attend on his shade in the palace of Odin; and lastly, his favourite wife was generally consumed with him on the same pile. But, we have already had occasion to treat of this senseless barbarity: and here let us take our leave of the north.

LETTER LXXXII.

SOME people seem possessed of that happy genius, and that inexhaustible fund of ability, that they have only to wish in order to succeed. Were I so fortunate as to be of this number, I should not now be in doubt, whether I have conveyed to you a just idea of my subject, or whether I have not rather scattered and confounded the materials, which the patient industry of others has enabled me to make use of. But, you will bear with me with patience; and more especially, as the light even of reason herself has been too feeble to pierce the almost universal darkness, which licentious desolation at one period disastrously introduced into the world. To tear from mankind the records of the memory of their fathers, was the wretched expedient to which nations had recourse in support of their dominion.

I am now about to make an excursion, for the eccentricity of which I shall most probably be condemned. But, I consider myself as so much

the arbitrary master of my own ground, that I cannot but feel myself warranted, in taking the road the most convenient in my own apprehension. Truths, respecting the same general end, may be pursued in a variety of ways. I see no reason, why I should labour through Italy and Greece to arrive at last in Palestine and Judea. A much shorter cut presents itself; and therefore, if you are not startled at the leap, our little sylphs (for as oriental scyons we are entitled to them) shall attend us across the continent, and land us for a moment in the country of the Israelites.

In the early stages of our correspondence, I endeavoured to prove to you, that the Jews in no respect pretended to be the oldest people upon earth. Such a pretension, indeed, would have contradicted the whole tenour of their own annals. The Scythians were in all probability anterior to the Israelites. Nay, do not smile: what was Job? Was he not a prince or chief descended from Esau, and who lived in Idumea? In the poem are two distinct features; the afflictions which befel him, and the exemplary conduct which he manifested under them, both having, as fact, every probability in their support. But, the dress in which they are clothed,

the beautiful imagery, and the sublime machinery with which they are adorned, are strong marks of being the composition of some tuneful bard, who, for the instruction or the amusement of mankind, conceived it right to celebrate the virtues of his master.

Do not mistake me here, however, and suppose I am about to meddle wantonly with a subject, which I am full well assured has every claim to veneration and respect. My mind is animated by a very different purpose. I have no desire, under the pretence of freedom of thought, to raise difficulties, and cast doubt on what has been sanctioned by ages. That understanding cannot be very distinguishing, which mistakes opposition for the spirit of enquiry. If a man be singular, let him be singular for something; let his intentions at least be benevolent, and let his aim be the good of mankind. Miserable, trite free-thinking, I have always been convinced, may, indeed, catch the applause of the unlearned, but will, at the same time, embolden the stripling to cast off for ever the sweet blush of modesty, confirm the dissolute veteran in the practice of his impure habits, and suggest great occasion of merriment, and wanton mockery, to the
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the flagitious of every denomination, and of every age.*

At the same time, where errors and inconsistencies, where evidently fabulous stories and unsound philosophy are to be discovered, there I cannot implicitly give credence to what has been handed down to us; nor can I conscientiously acquiesce in the supposition, that absurdity and contradiction may be immediately derived from the fountain of wisdom, purity, and truth. Revelation and history are distinct things. Revelation comes from God, but history is the production of man, and in consequence is liable to all the imperfections and fallibility of man. It does not follow, because the erroneous and popular prejudices of the times led the Israelites to imagine the earth a vast plain, and the celestial bodies no more than luminaries hung up in the concave firmament to enlighten it, that the whole of the Mosaic history is to be called in doubt, or that Moses could not be a proper instrument in the hands of Providence, to impart to the Jews a divine law, because he was not inspired with a foreknowledge of the Copernican and Newtonian systems.

• Bishop Watson.

systems. We are too often misled, I am sorry to say it, by the common notion that the Scriptures are the *word* of God. They are undoubtedly the sacred repository of all the revelations, promises, dispensations, and precepts, which God vouchsafed to make to the Jews: but by this expression we are not to understand that every part of this voluminous collection of historical, poetical, prophetic, theological, and moral writings, which we call the Bible, has been dictated by the immediate influence of divine inspiration. Such ground is not to be defended. Pertinacious bigotry may chuse to adhere to it; common sense, however, must see how fatally this operates. Saint Austin, indeed, on the authority of Isaiah, would have faith to precede reason. "Unless ye believe, ye will not understand." * That is to say, we should first believe, that we may afterwards be able to understand what we believe. But can any thing be so revolting, as the principle which makes belief precede, instead of following the understanding of a question? † Were nothing else to be considered, it cannot be supposed the Scriptures are sheltered from the negligencies of copyists or transcribers. The various readings are undoubted proofs of various errors. And I
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* Chap. 6.

† Epist. 222.

am not afraid to say, we should look upon these as manuscript imperfections in manuscript authorities.

Bolingbroke, who attended very little to the rules of decency when the Scriptures fell in his way, compares the history of the Pentateuch to the romances of which Don Quixote was so fond, and pronounces the man who receives it as authentic, as mad as the knight. Those who attempt to justify it, says he, have ill hearts as well as heads, and are worse than atheists, though they may pass for saints. Such narrations cannot make the slightest impressions on minds fraught with knowledge and void of superstition. Imposed by authority, and assisted by artifice, the delusion hardly prevails over sober sense; blind ignorance almost sees, and rash superstition hesitates: nothing less than enthusiasm and phrenzy can give credit to such histories, or apply such examples.

With an unfeigned sincerity, I am proud to declare it, I honour and reverence the sacred Scriptures: but I am not in consequence bound to honour and reverence all the rust and refuse, which they may have collected in their long and perilous voyage, and during the disasters of their captivity.

s captivity. Neither am I to suppose, from the Hebrew phraseology, that God talked with Abraham and others, mouth to mouth, and with an audible voice, as one man would with another; or that men were almost as familiar with angels as with their fellow men. These are things not to be believed, for they are contrary to nature and reason, and to all the general laws and harmony of the world. But, figuratively and allegorically I must allow, they are to bear an interpretation; especially when we know there are passages which give the most sublime ideas of the majesty of the Supreme Being, the glory of his works, and the incomprehensible methods of his providence.

The Bible, indeed, were it considered in no other light than as it respects the history of mankind, is the most venerable monument of antiquity that is extant. In every part of it there reigns a character of simplicity, and an impartial regard to truth. In no parts are there false and flattering accounts of the Jewish nation, or partial and elegant encomiums on their great men. Their renowned actions, it is true, are recorded, but their faults are also related. With a noble freedom they reprove their kings, princes, priests, and people. No men ever formed their history

so much to the disadvantage of their own nation, or charged themselves with such repeated revolts from the religion and laws of their country. In short, in the narrative of the Scriptures, I see an oriental story delivered in an oriental dress, which dress is familiar even at this day. In the moral, I see practical and excellent precepts ; in the prophetic, I see mysterious but astonishing anticipations ; and in the poetical, a strain of unexampled dignity, sentiment, and elevation.

The laws of the Israelites, particularly the ceremonial, are said to have been nothing but the laws of the Egyptians, which Moses became acquainted with while resident in the land of the Pharaohs. The *urim* and *thummim*, say these mythologists, was in imitation of the locket of jewels which hung from the neck of the Egyptian high priest, as mentioned by Diodorus Siculus. The linen garments which the Jewish high priests, and other inferior ones, wore, were copied from the Egyptian priest, who was clad in the same manner, according to Herodotus and Plutarch. The cherubims were only the imitation of the hieroglyphic or image of Apis, that is, the bull ; or of those *Θηρία πολύμορφα*, so much in fashion among the Egyptians, as the sphinx, &c. over their temples. In like manner, the ark
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of the covenant was copied from the use of the cista, in the rites of the Egyptian Osiris, the orgies of Bacchus, and the Eleusinian mysteries. The feasts of new moons were derived from a like practice; as Jewish purifications were from the lustrations. And lastly, the Temple of Jerusalem was but a mere copy of similar temples in Egypt; the Egyptians, as observed by Herodotus, being the first authors of altars, images, and temples.

Philo says, Moses learnt also arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, mathematics, music, and symbolical philosophy, from the Egyptians; to which may be added, physics in general; and in short, that he was a proficient in all the learning of Egypt.* But the symbols of the serpent, the ark, the iris, and the dove, together with many others, were known to the Israelites long before their descent into Egypt. They were originally, as I have already proved to you, from that country, where the fathers of the Israelites of old resided.† The Jewish people were undoubtedly much attached to Egyptian manners, and repeatedly fell into Egyptian superstitions; and hence the laws of Moses were framed, partly in compliance with their prejudices, and

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* Clem. Alex.

† Bryant Mythol.

partly in opposition to their superstition. But, it is somewhat more than infatuation, to derive every thing from Egypt. Had not any other nations, give me leave to ask, the grace to say their prayers, the vanity to ornament themselves, or the sense to put themselves under cover, until the Egyptians taught them the way? It is here too easy for adversaries to retort, and the two rigidly orthodox should advert to it, that, upon this supposition, if the Egyptians had not also enjoined honour to parents, and restrained theft by punishment, the Jews had been in a wretched condition when they arrived to take possession of the land of Canaan.*

Among the observations which the oriental Gentiles made on the history of the Jews, we are told they found, that the divine will † was to be known by certain appearances in precious stones. The Magi of the east also, believing that the preternatural discoveries obtained by means of the urim and thummim, were owing to some virtues inherent in these stones, adopted the knowledge of the occult properties of gems, as a branch of their magical system. Hence it became the peculiar profession of one class of their

* Warburton,

† Ibid.

their sages, to investigate and interpret the various shades and corruscations, and to explain to a moral purpose, the different colours, the dews, the clouds, and imageries, which gems differently exposed to the sun, moon, and stars, fire, or air, at particular seasons, and inspected by persons particularly qualified, were seen to exhibit. * The Druidical doctrines, concerning the virtues of stones, have not been improbably derived, either mediately or immediately, from the same source with those of the Jews : doctrines which are still to be traced among the traditions in those parts of Britain and Ireland, where Druidism retained its latest establishments.†

The birth and education of Moses, his endowments from Providence, and his having been thoroughly instructed in all the learning, laws, religion, and policy of Egypt, for the first forty years of his life, would, no doubt, in great measure, account for the constitution of his law, and his subsequent manner of government. But, natural magic, it is observed, or occult experimental philosophy, (witness the miracles wrought by the sorcerers) must have been carried to an extraordinary height in his time, in Egypt. All such knowledge was also sacred, and never to

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* Warton. † Martin's West. Isles. Aubrey's Miscell

be divulged, or discovered to the profane and vulgar. And hence may be seen the manner, in which the priests maintained their authority, and impressed the people with a strong belief that they were endued with supernatural, miraculous, and divine power, and in which they professed to keep up a free and intimate intercourse with the Gods. Forty years retirement subsequently, is likewise to be added, together with the additional advantage of all the knowledge and experience of another great politician, the prince and priest of Midian, whose daughter he married ; from all which, most readily are to be deduced his miracles, his prodigies, prophecies, revelations, and other such like strong impressions and mysterious powers, to a populace grounded in Egyptian superstition, and who could be influenced and governed by nothing else !

Philosophy certainly triumphs over prejudices which are past, and may guard against those which are to come. But, it is as certain, that prejudices of the present time or place, as often triumph over philosophy. It is to be remarked, however, that Moses, in the system of his legislation, is nowhere unintelligible or obscure ; nowhere a dealer in incomprehensibility, or in the contemptible

tible subterfuges of imposition. Neither does he any where venture an insult upon common understanding, nor make such promises, for instance, as St. Bernard did ; who for every acre of ground he extorted from superstition, pledged himself for three acres of good arable land in Paradise. Moses's law is nevertheless called a wretched scheme of superstition ; as neither having truth nor goodness in it ; and as being contrary to reason, however, speciously set up, under the popular pretence of a divine instruction and revelation.

The law of Moses was instituted for a particular country, as well as for a particular people ; a people confined within very narrow limits, but bold in prosperity, and proud in adversity. While even their God conducted them through the wilderness with a visible hand, they forgot him : they revolted from him, while the peals of thunder, that proclaimed his descent on the mountain, sounded in their ears ; and while he dictated his laws to their leader. Not all the power that Omnipotence thought proper to exert, was sufficient to humble, or bring into obedience this stubborn generation. Is it to be credited, therefore, we are asked, that God should manifest so unreasonable a partiality, as

to love and favour one of the most wicked nations in the world, while he hated and abandoned all the rest? Or, if more were intended, was this extraordinary dispensation, which was to reclaim the several nations of the earth from gross idolatry, and moral wickedness, ever given to those nations? On the contrary, were not the Jews, by their fundamental laws and constitution, bound to abstain from friendship, intercourse, and communion with every other nation; and consequently precluded thereby from propagating the spirit of the true religion?

There was a latitudinarian harmony, indeed, among the religions of the ancient world. There was a facility during Paganism, with which the most different, and even hostile nations embraced, or at least respected, each other's superstitions. In this common intercourse, the Jews unquestionably refused to join. But what man can penetrate the designs of the Almighty? Had complete indifference, or an acquiescence in the fashionable mockeries of the day, regulated the conduct of the Jews, whence would have arisen that Christian light, which was to illuminate and beautify the earth? Might not the authority of Moses and the prophets, together with a pertinacious attachment to ceremonial laws, to types
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and figures, have been intended as precursors to a more pure and spiritual worship, equally adapted to all climates, and to every condition of man? Had the laws of Moses vanished, we had lost the basis of Christianity: nor should we have had the proof, that the promise of divine favour, instead of being partially confined to the posterity of Abraham, was universally to be the lot of the freeman and slave, the Greek and the barbarian, the Jew and the Gentile.

The extraordinary interposition of Divine Providence in this case, I know, is absolutely denied. The metaphysical or physical influence of spirits, suggestions, silent communications, injections of ideas, Bolingbroke declares he cannot comprehend; and he compares them to the altering or suspending the course of the sun, or revolutions of the earth, in the physical system. And that all such interpositions in the intellectual system, as should give new thoughts, and new dispositions to the minds of men, cannot be conceived, without altering, in every such instance, the natural progression of the human understanding, and that freedom of the will, of which every man is conscious.

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I will not at present enter argumentatively into this subject. But how came Bolingbroke to be so thoroughly acquainted with the laws of the intellectual system, as to be able to pronounce so decidedly on its capacities? That one man can suggest or communicate thoughts and ideas to another by language, and that there is nothing in this contrary to the nature and order of the understanding, or the freedom of will, is universally acknowledged. Why then should it be thought impossible for Almighty God himself, the giver of all the gifts we culpably or meritoriously make use of, to communicate thoughts and ideas to the human mind? Is it not reasonable to conclude, that the best way of working upon men as rational creatures, and of influencing their actions in a manner agreeable to the just order of their faculties, is to suggest proper thoughts or ideas to their minds, from which others are to arise, of which we are ignorant of the combination, and the possessors themselves, are even unable to explain?

But this very writer, elsewhere speaking of that extraordinary action of God upon the mind, which the word inspiration is now used to denote, expressly acknowledges, "It is no more incomprehensible, than the ordinary action of mind

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on body, or body on mind."* Indeed, no man can deny the possibility of this influence, who has any belief in the existence of the providence of God. Even the most rooted unbelievers have been forced to allow, that God may have an omnipotency, somewhat superior to the little syllogisms and quirks, with which they are permitted to puzzle their own limited understandings.

Invective is never had recourse to, when there is sufficiency of reason. When Jupiter, in an argument, began to hurl his thunder, he was instantly known to be in the wrong. Let this be applied to the angry man, who says, I know most intuitively, that no creature of the same nature as I am, (and I presume the Israelites were human creatures) could have resisted the evidence of the revelations, the miracles, and the traditions recorded in the Bible, if such things ever had happened; for such interposition must have terrified the most audacious, and convinced the most incredulous: yet the Israelites did resist them; consequently, all that is said relative to the Mosaic history will not amount to proof, unless it be said, that they who cannot give to this history

tory even the credit of human, can give it the authority of divine authenticity.

Where mystery begins, religion, I know, ends. Figures and types are in general only strong entrenchments of metaphysical theology. And, therefore, all shadows of illusive fancy, so pleasing to the imagination, but which delight to hover in the gloom of poetical, yet unsubstantial forms, should vanish before truth. But the philosopher, by giving too great a rein to unbridled scepticism, often, though surrounded by brilliancy and candour, runs distant from the object of his pursuit. Insufficient reasoning and false deductions are inevitable, when an author predetermines his system, and then racks his imagination for its support.

What was the Mosaical dispensation? It was, in my mind, really and in substance, the same religion that was professed and practised by the patriarchs, with the modification only of a special covenant; the principal end and main view of which, was to preserve the worship and adoration of the one living and true God. Yet the Jews are accused of making man the original, and God only the copy. It is even said,
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the first principles, and the whole tenor of the Jewish laws, emancipated that people from all moral obligations to the rest of mankind; that they were taught to think themselves a chosen race, distinct from the rest of mankind, and who were far from owing to other men, what other men owed to them, and to one another. And thence we are asked, can God command in particular, what he forbids in general? He who has made benevolence, to all rational beings, the fundamental law of their nature, can he command some to rob, and others to murder; to usurp on the rights of their fellow-creatures; and to extirpate whole nations?

I love that zeal which, with solemnity, undertakes the cause of God. Nor would I cast a momentary thought upon the story of the Jews, as conceived to be connected with that cause, more than I would upon that of any other people, were I not convinced that they have experienced attacks of virulent persecution and misrepresentation, which even the hand of licentiousness would not have dared to have lifted against any other sect. We are edified, indeed, with hearing, that the Jewish Scriptures ascribed to God not only corporeal appearances, but corporeal actions, and all the instruments of it, eyes, ears,

ears, mouth, hands, and feet ; and that they are apt in many places to make those who read them represent the Supreme Being to themselves, like an old man looking out of the clouds.

Horrible blasphemy this! Is it not?—in a people speaking in an ancient and figurative language ; and speaking, as is their misfortune now, to a modern people, who will not candidly understand that language, although analogy distinctly points out the way in which it ought to be interpreted ? If we compare the sacred books of the Jews with those of any other, the most admired nations, such as the Greeks and Romans, for instance, shall we not immediately see a more striking difference, and that too in their favour, in at least one article, namely, that of all the constitutions in the world, the Jewish was the only one, where the acknowledgement and worship of the true God, the sovereign Lord of the universe, and of him alone was made the fundamental maxim of their state, and principle of the government, in which all their laws concentered, and towards which end all were directed ?

Theism has been looked upon by the sages of all ages, as of all systems of religion, the only
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one really favourable to virtue. It is the firm rational belief of God, built upon pure philosophical grounds. The religion of Abraham appears to have been theism, intended as a reformation of the superstition of the Chaldeans. Socrates was a theist, who, like Abraham, believed in divine inspirations. His disciple Plato ornamented the theism of his master with a mystical colouring, extracted from Egypt and the east. The most enlightened among the Romans were theists. The primitive Christians were theists; our Saviour himself, in his practice and doctrines, is supposed to have been a theist. Mahommed, even in combating the polytheism of his country, only meant, perhaps, at first to bring back the Arabs to the pure theism of Abraham, and of his son Ishmael.

De mortuis nil nisi bonum, drops in sweet accents from every one's tongue. Yet how treacherous is man to posthumous reputation, which flourished more than three thousand years ago! Does little jealousy retrospectively creep into the tomb? Is the modern sceptic to sicken now, because an ancient lawgiver was renowned among his people? The dead listen, indeed, as little to our praise as to our commendation. But why weaken the spring even of present gratitude, by
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robbing those of their fame, whose memory was dwelt upon with gratitude, and whose reward was supposed to be in heaven?

I acknowledge, that the same degree of evidence which would make a natural fact probable and credible, would not be sufficient to prove a miracle. Whatever certainty God may convey to a man's mind by inspiration, or immediate revelation, the knowledge of any such truth can go no further upon divine authority, or as a matter of divine faith, than to the person or persons thus inspired, or to whom the revelation is made; and whoever afterwards receives it from them, must take it up on their sole authority, and not upon a divine testimony, or upon the authority of God. If another man, upon my testimony, should believe that I have a revelation from God, which could not otherwise have been known, he believes in me and not in God, unless God should, in like manner, reveal to him that he had made such a prior revelation to me; and then my testimony, or the proof of my prior revelation, would be needless to him. In a word, there can be no such thing as divine faith upon human testimony. This absurd supposition has been the ground of all the superstition and false religion of the world.

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Why the works of Moses, and the chronicles of the Israelites, are not to be interpreted by the same rules of natural and rational probability that all other human testimonials are, I, for my own part, confess, I know not. Surely it is no more incumbent upon me to believe, that the bones of Elisha, after he had been dead and buried, recovered a dead corpse, and made it a living man again, than I should that St. Charles Boromeo's nose, or St. Iræneus's skull, can draw into re-existence the *cadavres* that are lodged so very much within their reach at Lyons and at Milan. But we are told, the whole system of life, while the theocracy was yet visible, had an appearance so different from all other scenes of human action, that the reader of the sacred volume must habitually consider it as a peculiar mode of existence of a distinct species of mankind, that lived and acted with manners incommunicable; so that it would be difficult even for imagination to place the present generation in the state of those whose story is related; and by consequence their joys and their griefs are not easily to be adopted, nor can the attention be very much interested in any thing that befalls them.*

To this I object, and contrary to the evident tendency of the principle advanced, that it is not alone where the events are confessedly miraculous, that fancy and fiction are to lose their effect. Whenever imagination grows lawless and wild, rambles out of the precincts of nature, tells of events repugnant to our clearest and most distinct ideas, and to all the known laws of nature, reason does not, we know, connive a moment; but far from receiving such narrations, as worthy of credibility, she without hesitation rejects them as fabulous. It is true, and I believe it was, as it still must be, the unanimous opinion of the Israelitish Rabbins, that the law of Moses was not obligatory upon any other people than the Jews themselves. The Jews only were bound to a due performance of the Mosaical law. Thus, says a candid enquirer;* “If the rest of mankind do but keep the law of nature, the Jews maintain they thereby perform all that God requires of them, and these they call the pious nations of the world: and hence they do not think their religion the *only infallible one* to salvation; as every other religion and sect esteems itself.”

At the same time, is it not a fact, strange as it may seem, that the Jews not only differ from
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* David Levi.

the Christians, but that Jews and Christians both differ among themselves, concerning points in the Scripture, which literal, instead of symbolical interpretation, hath rendered mysterious? It is a difficult matter to conceive a style or language suitable to all inclinations and capacities. Some will have pomp, which they mistake for dignity; and in order that expressions may be above vulgar phrase, will have them lifted above vulgar apprehension. Others, on the contrary, will have so gentle a deviation into unornamented periods, that it would seem, as if they would verify the first curse, of creeping upon the ground all the days of their lives.. The celebrated Malbranche conceived the pleasure which arises from perusing a well written book to be of the criminal kind, as having its source in weakness and effeminacy.

It is an incorrect taste, which delights either in turgid verbosity, or in inanimate monotony; and surely that mind must be uncommonly severe, which can find any thing to condemn in adding charms to truth, and gaining the heart by captivating the ear; in uniting roses with the thorns of legislation, and joining pleasure with instruction. The oriental order of com-

position has more fire in it, than the compositions of other countries. It deals in energy. It seizes the imagination at once. It impresses itself, by the aid of ardent and powerful images, more than by the anxious minuteness of laboured illustration. What inimitable beauty is there in some parts of the sacred writ ! The expression is never too big for the sense, but justly great in proportion to it. It is the sentiment that swells and fills out the diction, which rises with it, and forms itself about it : in the same degree, that the thought becomes warmer, the expression becomes brighter ; as that is more strong, this is more conspicuous. The main secret of sublimity is, to say great things in few and plain words ; for every superfluous decoration degrades a sublime idea.

LETTER LXXXIII.

VOLTAIRE laughs at the idea of Adam and Eve cultivating a garden of Eden, of at least one thousand eight hundred leagues in length. But, did the witty philosopher recollect, there was a country of Eden, as well as a garden of Eden? When, the Scripture says, "The Lord planted a garden in Eden," it is very clearly intimated, that there was a country of that denomination, as well as a garden. The same writer, also, ironically remarks, that Adam was created an hermaphrodite, for that God created him male and female. But here, as a critic, he palpably manifests an ignorance of the text. The text says, *them* he created male and female. Moreover, Adam, or Ha-Adam, is not a proper name. It is an appellative proper to both sexes, as *homo*, in Latin, and *homme* in French. The sense, therefore, had Voltaire understood the original, was, that God had created two individuals, whom he called Ha-Adam, or man.

But what shall we say to that most surprising of all things, we are asked, that God, after having made man and woman, should again make the same woman from the side of the same man? * The allegorical explanation, to which we have already had recourse, with respect to several passages of Genesis, will solve this difficulty. The passage is understood allegorically by Cardinal Cajetan. The Jewish commentators themselves interpret it as an emblem, expressive of the concord and harmony which should always subsist in the connubial state, where souls and bodies are supposed to be unalterably united.† But it might, and did, perhaps, originally stand otherwise in the first book of the Pentateuch. The ancient memoirs, or the traditions from which Moses compiled this part of his history, might not have been correct at the period he consulted them; the order of his history may have been deranged; the copyists may have been incorrect; or, as other historians, Moses, with an aim to brevity, may have given rapidly in a word, at the commencement of his work, what he might find it afterwards necessary to detail.

“The paradise of Eden,” says Philo, “is a spiritual paradise. Adam is the spirit, Eve the flesh,

* Voltaire.

† Lettres de quelques Juifs.

flesh ; and the serpent, the principle of voluptuousness. The mind, therefore, of Adam being seduced by the pleasures of sense, the man became criminal ; he fell from his primitive situation, and lost his happiness with his innocence."

"What being, is there," says Origen, "who can be so gross in his ideas, as to conceive that God, as a gardener, planted a garden ; that he literally placed the tree of life in it ; that the fruit of that tree was eaten as we eat any common fruit ; and that the knowledge of good and evil resulted from the repast ; that God amused himself with walking among his improvements ; and that Adam, in shame, concealed himself from his view among the trees ?"

It is scarcely to be credited, that any other interpretation, than that of allegory, could ever have been soberly given to such expressions. Especially as nothing is so certain, metaphorically speaking, as that science, plucked and eaten, and turned to bad purposes, is of all evils the most destructive. Let us hear, however, what another explanation says of this garden of Eden. According to this, the memoirs whence the second and third chapters of Genesis were compiled, were originally written in hieroglyphics ; and when it was resolved to render them alphabeti-

cally, the plain facts were not looked upon as sufficient, but the whole emblematical representation was thought necessary to be given, and was therefore adopted in the lump, and so handed down, *a la lettre*, to posterity. Thus, by the nakedness of our first parents, at which they did not blush, we are to understand their pure and perfect innocence ; and so of the rest.

This fall of man, this proneness in man's nature to be the victim to his passions, is extraordinarily engrafted upon the early history of every nation upon earth. They all remount to the same allegorical fact, and all dip in the same source. Boulanger even attempts to prove, that every religion among the ancients had some allusion or reference to it, particularly those of a Scythiac descent. And hence the expression, that we are formed in the image of God ; not our bodies, but our principle of intelligence, our souls.

This gift of our first parents, this presumption from knowledge, or degradation from intemperance, is likewise given to us in inheritance. It has even been the received doctrine, that this guilt has been transferred to the whole of Adam's posterity, and that on his account alone, we are
obnoxious

obnoxious to the divine wrath. But whoever could consider guilt otherwise than as a personal thing, or any more to be transferred, than one man's being can be transferred to another? Let me ask, if Adam's sin was the occasion of ours, what was the occasion of his? It was an opinion, I know, formerly universal, *excepting, indeed; among the Jews*, that the innocent may be justly involved in the same punishment with the guilty. In Greece it was authorized by positive law. In Carthage it was from usage admitted. Even in Rome it was more than acquiesced in, for we find the most enlightened man, in the most enlightened period of the republic, and one who was no mean moralist, approving the practice. "I am sensible of the hardship of punishing the child for the crime of the parent," says he; "this, however, is a wise appointment of our laws; for hereby the parent is bound to the interest of the state by the strongest of all ties, his affection for his offspring."*

I have said, and to their honour be it spoken, the Jews were the first, and the only people we read of, who had correct notions on this head; at the same time, indeed, that there are instances,

* Cicero.

stances, even among the Jews (and I am far from wishing to conceal it) of children and relations being involved in the same punishment with the guilty. "The fathers shall not be put to death," however, says Moses, in the last book of his law, "for the children; neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin."* "The soul that sinneth, saith the Lord, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father; neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."†

If the transmission of punishment to the immediate descendant was thus barred by the legislator of the Jews, how are we to conceive that God Almighty himself should be so unmerciful, as to call us to an account for the crime of an old forefather, committed nearly six thousand years ago? I would not willingly offend in speaking of original sin; but I can no more be persuaded that sin can descend in the blood, than I can that a man's knowledge and abilities can run in the veins; for I believe a man may be as easily born a ready made philosopher or divine,

* Deuteronomy, xxiv.

† Ezekiel.

vine, as he can be born a ready made profligate, or sinner. But supposing there was such traductive guilt, the child, surely, could no more deserve punishment for it, than he could for inheriting his father's distempers; which, in charity, one would suppose, would deserve pity rather than punishment. Nay, it would seem altogether inconsistent with divine justice and mercy, because the guilt must have been infused into the soul by God, when he originally made it; which would argue a double degree of pravity, first, to implant sin in man, and then to punish him for it. How tremendous! to imagine God inflicting conscious misery, and that eternally, on millions and millions, for a single sin committed before they were brought into existence. How frightful to suppose, that he takes the sweet infant, by death, from the affectionate mother's breast, almost as soon as it becomes capable of casting its innocent smiles in her face; and the still more advanced little pratler from the father's knee, and casts them both into hell, to suffer conscious misery, without end, for they know not what!

The language of allegory is the language of poetry. The people of old were, in general, styled the children of the God they worshipped:
hence

hence they at last fancied themselves his real offspring; and looked up to him as their true parent. In the same manner, priests were represented as foster-fathers to the Deity, and priestesses as *τηρηται*, or nurses, or sometimes as daughters.* Thus, under its patronymic, we read of a nation collectively, as that Israel abode in tents; that Judah was put to the worst in battle; that Dan abode in ships; and Asher remained on the sea coast. And thus, also, we are to construe, the naming the animals of the earth by Adam. The text says, simply, "and the name which Adam called each animal, is, or was its name." That is, the names which were used by Adam and his descendants, were still the names which were in familiar use in the days of the Israelites. To conclude, what more evidently figurative, than the command of Joshua to the sun and moon? Nothing more was meant, than that the battle began early in the morning, and was continued till late, or night, after the moon was risen; or perhaps till the next day. What could be more natural, in a song of triumph, than to represent the day of victory as exceeding others in length, as well as celebrity; and the hero, as retarding the sun and the moon in their course? Such figures could not appear extravagant.

* Bryant.

gant to the Jews. God is often represented as fighting for Israel ; and in the song of Deborah, the stars in their courses are said to have fought against Sisera. In a similar manner may be explained the fall of the walls of Jericho, on the shouting of the people ; this was nothing more than the *cri d'armes*, the signal for attack ; and in consequence of this assault, the place was taken by storm, and the walls destroyed. Even Samson's exploits were really nothing more than what might be expected from a man of extraordinary personal courage and strength, and are only rendered marvellous by the poetical exaggerations of the narration.

But, setting all this aside, we are asked, could God establish iniquity by law? Or could a law, which in St. Paul's opinion, introduced and confirmed a state of civil and religious blindness and bigotry, tyranny and slavery, have been in the same judgment, originally a divine institution, and an immediate revelation from God? To put women and children to the sword who had never injured them, and who were quietly and peaceably enjoying their own, in order to enter upon their possessions and properties in Canaan, and to plead a divine authority and commission for all this, was it not the highest complication of outrage,

rage, bloody cruelty, superstition, and profanation of the holy name and awful authority of God, that human nature can be capable of?*

Mercy forbid, that I should say a word in the defence of murder, or that I should disgracefully frustrate the object of every honest man's views, by the vindication of atrocity. The political leaders of the Jews did march their people to tyrannical and sanguinary wars, and that too, impiously, as I fear not to call it, under the declared guidance of the God of heaven. But, divested of every sort of theocratical pretension, were they in this instance more guilty than the other nations of antiquity? We have seen in what light the Scythians, the Celts, and other ancient people have considered war. By what right, let me ask, had the Romans, whose name is so greatly celebrated, and whom we are so much inclined to favour, a claim to the government of the earth? In the early ages, how did the Medes treat the Assyrians; and the Persians the Medes? How afterwards did the Romans treat the Persians; and the Celts and Scythians the Romans?

We read, much too frequently, in the Jewish history, that certain people and even whole nations

* Moral Philosophy.

tions were put to the sword. Would to God the Jewish history had contained the whole of such opprobrium! I will not, as a palliative, advert to modern times, though the foul page of devastation lies before me! But, turn your eyes to the barbarous severity of the Pagan world; "Cædes totâ urbe passim factæ," says Livy; speaking of Tarentum, "nec ulli puberum, qui obviu fuit, parcebatur." Among the generals of antiquity, some few are renowned for continence, and for an unusual command of vicious propensities; but what law of the ancients, like that of Moses, ever wrested from the dreadful wantonness of the soldiery the miserable prisoners whom fortune had put into their hands? By the code of Moses, no injury under pain of death was to be offered even to the defenceless fair one, whom war had brought into captivity. The customs of war among the Greeks and Romans, were they not then more cruel than among the Jews? The general maxim of the Greeks and Romans was, *lex nulla victo parcit*. The mild Titus, the love and delight of mankind, when he took Jerusalem, put to death a multitude of Jews, who had surrendered at discretion. Two thousand of the wretched garrison he ordered to be hanged, and two thousand to be exposed to wild beasts in the arena, on the
2 birth-day,

birth-day, and for the amusement of his brother Domitian : ninety-seven thousand were exposed to sale, and others he disposed of in gifts : and this was the man, whose benevolence was so great, that he grieved if he amused away a day.

Cast your eyes for a moment on the condition of captives in the imperial city of Rome ! Look at the prisoners ; both sexes at the uncontrolled disposition and brutality of their masters ; the laws of the capitol breathing a ferocity disgraceful to humanity. If a master were assassinated, all the unhappy wretches who lived under the same roof, or within the precincts of his domain, were indiscriminately put to death. Did some in their bondage arrive even at hoary age, nothing was to prevent their being turned out of doors, exposed and unable to procure sustenance, to all the horrors of famine and disease. To feed the fish of his ponds, whether satirically narrated, or truly, are we not told of a rich Patrician ordering the throat of a slave to be cut ? Even Cato, the wise Cato, did he blush to receive the shameful wages of wretched female captives, whom he hired out to prostitution ?

The whole system of the ordinances of Moses tended to two great and principal objects ; the
purity

purity of religion, and the permanency of the Jewish nation. For his doctrine went to the existence of one supreme and all-directing God, under whose authority it is in our own power to alleviate and qualify those evils, which it is not in our power to escape. What, though we cannot avoid sickness, poverty, and disgrace? We yet may by prudent reflection, avoid being immeasurably grieved by them. The mould of a man's fortune is in his own hands, though the materials are not. He can compromise with those difficulties he cannot shun. He cannot bend the laws of nature to his own will, but he can mollify their rigour.

I should wish to draw good precepts, not bad examples, from antiquity. The one may tend to make us better ; the other can be of no utility whatsoever, particularly as we have no politics of princes, nor fortunes of nations, to trace out or embellish ; nor any temptation to neglect disquisitions upon wholesome laws, for the sake of obtaining the splendid reputation of the philosophical atheist, or the glory of heroic inhumanity. When Moses instructed the children of Israel, what was the then situation of the world ? Instead of the true God, animate and inanimate substances, stocks, stones, rep-

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tiles, vegetables, insects, all indiscriminately were adored. Round the altars dedicated to religion, flowed the blood of human victims. In the sacred but mysterious temples, modesty and innocence hourly fell a sacrifice. Impious and absurd was the whole mass of the volume of mythology. Yet, in this universal deluge of error and infatuation, and in the midst of the most depraved of the children of the world, a man arose who taught the grandest and most sublime truths, the duty of man to God, to his neighbour, and to himself. .

Whence could the Jewish lawgiver have so exclusively derived such new and such extraordinary principles? What hand could have drawn him from the general ignorance, not only of all the Israelites, but of all the people who could have fallen within the circle of his knowledge? From without, or from within, he certainly must have derived this intellectual ability; for it will not be denied, that the Mosaic tables are at least a good short system of morality, and take in all the general heads of moral virtue. Even Longinus allowed Moses to be *ὁ μὲν ἄνθρωπος ὁ τυχεύων*, no mean man. So that the most inflexibly prejudiced against the Jews must allow, that whether the writers of the Bible were inspired

inspired men or impostors, they were at least men in their wits, and what is more, men of good sense.

The study of past ages, says a celebrated writer,* should never make one forget what is due to that in which one lives. The pen is frequently to be given up for the sword. And hence the reason, why the greatest part of the celebrated writers of antiquity were not simply the fabricators of books. Men of letters were in those days also warriors; ministers who were employed in the government of their country, and who performed conspicuous parts in the great theatre of affairs. Such among the Greeks, for instance, were Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Demosthenes, Eschines; and such among the Latins, were, Cicero, Sallust, Cæsar, Seneca, the two Plinys, and Tacitus.

But, true as this undoubtedly is, what are the vain boasts of mere victors? Their trophies in a little moment crumble into dust; while the name of the legislator, on the contrary, is inscribed on a fair and everlasting monument. To subdue men, is not to be illustrious; to civilize them, is to be both illustrious and im-

O 2

mortal,

* Hume.

mortal. By wisdom, by art, by the united strength of civil community, men have been enabled to subdue whole races of monsters, with which the earth was overrun; but the greatest of all subjugation has been the binding in laws and wholesome regulations, the ferocious violence, and dangerous treachery, of the human disposition. Penetrated with gratitude for the benefits thus conferred, we should arrest, as it were, the rapidity of time, and with enthusiasm contemplate the glorious shades, who, though long consigned to the silent tomb, still speak, still instruct, and still live, if I may so express myself, in eternal and undiminished vigour.

The laws of the Twelve Tables at Rome, obtained a blind and partial reverence. "They amuse the mind," says Cicero, "by the remembrance of old words, and the portrait of ancient manners; they inculcate the soundest principles of government and morals; and I am not afraid to affirm, that the brief composition of the decemviri surpasses in genuine value the libraries of Grecian philosophy."* The twelve tables were committed to the memory of the young, and the meditation of the old. Yet, these laws, like the statutes of Draco, were written in characters

* De Legibus.

ractions of blood.* By one of them, (and this law was not abolished till the 244th year of the city), creditors, who were alike obstinate and unrelenting, might legally dismember a debtor's body, and satiate their revenge by this horrid act of barbarity.† Does this resemble the morality of Moses, which has been eagerly and fondly transfused into the domestic and social institutions of all Europe, and even of many other parts of the world, and which for upwards of three thousand years, and during every species of persecution, has commanded the respect and obedience of the most enlightened nations? Must not that which in the eye of reason comes out with unabated lustre from the ordeal of criticism, be incontrovertibly pure? Hath the scepticism of ages been able to invalidate one commandment of the decalogue? Shall the oldest authenticated law upon earth be said to have no claim to veneration, when even the wayward hand of pyrrhonism has not been able, in these days of presumption, to bring it into doubt? With the blessed stamp of universal utility then, with which it is adorned, and firmly supported as it is by a general and unequivocal acquiescence in its truth and natural advantages, what mind can have difficulty in admitting

O 3.

* Aulus Gellius.

† Gibbon.

mitting its divine efficacy, even though it should unfortunately doubt of its divine revelation?

There is something within us, which goes beyond bare curiosity, and even carries us on to enthusiasm and friendship for those great characters, whom we know to have excelled in former ages. We acquire a degree of complacency in their society; we form an union with them in the sentiments they approve; we are even led to defend them when we think they are injuriously attacked, and to stand by them at all times with a partial affection. Let this then be my apology, I intreat you, on the present occasion. I see, or think I see, in the laws of Moses, that moral light which has guided all our footsteps. Is there a vice which Moses does not condemn? Is there a bad desire, much less a bad action, which he does not make amenable to coercion? In his precepts to the Israelites, besides enforcing equity and justice, honesty, fidelity, and uprightness, does he not encourage also humanity, compassion, and charity, and especially doing unto others as we would wish others to do unto us? In a word, his doctrine was calculated to render man estimable to man, and respectable to himself, and the

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the chief duties of society to consist in the reciprocal promotion of social happiness.

It has always been the practice, and probably with good reason, to be loud in the praise of Romulus, Lycurgus, and Solon, for their agrarian laws. But, in their distribution of land, and in the distribution of the conquered countries by their successors, I own I can perceive nothing like the just and equable division which is to be found in the agrarian ordinances of Moses. Examine them, they are well worthy the perusal. But, for a moment, let us be somewhat more particular on the bearings and outlines of the Israelitish story. What I have to say shall not detain you long.

The history of Moses may be divided into two periods; from the creation to his mission; and from his mission to the delivering up his command to Joshua: the first, was written by him in quality of historian; the second, of legislator. And here it may not be unnecessary for you to recollect, that so great was the degeneracy of the Israelites, and so sensible was Moses of the effects of this degeneracy, that he often would willingly have declined the office of their leader and deliverer. He thought their recovery from

Egyptian superstition to be altogether desperate ; and humanly speaking, he did not judge amiss ; as may be gathered from their conduct during the extraordinary progress of their deliverance.

The whole history of the Jews, is one continued series of infraction of the law, and of natural calamity. Not even all the severe ordinances of Moses, of the judges, and of the kings, were sufficient for their reformation. Until their captivity they always transgressed the law. After that disaster, indeed, they as scrupulously adhered to it, and in that attachment they have continued ever since. It seems a mistake, however, to suppose the Jewish separation, I mean as relative to other nations, to have been effected by divine interposition. That idea was founded in the vain fancy of Jewish pride, that their fathers were selected as the favourites of God, out of his fondness for the race of Abraham.

The government established by Moses, you will recollect, was a theocracy : the most singular form, perhaps, that ever entered into the imagination of man. No lawgiver, or founder of religion, ever promised so singular a distinction as he did to the children of Israel. No historian ever dared to record so remarkable a privilege.

vilege.* Even supposing it not supported by any extraordinary providence, it was the most vigorous and intrepid measure, that ever was adopted for the subjugation of barbarism and depravity.

Moses delivered to the Israelites a complete digest of law, and of religion. But, to fit it to the nature of a theocratic government, he gave it perfectly incorporated. To cement the body politic, he employed the medium of religion; for it was evidently his opinion, that whoever would secure civil government, must support it by the means of religion; and whoever would propagate religion, must perpetuate it by the means of civil government. Hence also the rewards promised, and the punishments denounced, through him by heaven, were *temporal* only; such as, on the one hand, health, long life, peace, plenty, and dominion; and on the other, disease, immature death, war, famine, want, subjection, and captivity. And in no one of his institutes is there the least mention, or intelligible hint, of the rewards and punishments of another life.† He observes a profound silence concerning a future state: “As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away; so he

* Warburton.

† Ibid.

he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more."

A theocracy with terrestrial limitations, as the most convenient form of government, Moses conceived it right to adopt. The Israelites, on their leaving Egypt, were sunk into the lowest practices of idolatry. To recover them, something more sensible was necessary; something more unequivocally declaratory of good and evil, than the prospect of an hereafter. But, this form of government was not capable of being established under God's character, as sovereign of the universe. Under the character of king of Israel, indeed, it might: and hence it is we find him, in the Old Testament, so frequently represented with affections analogous to human passions. But, even this was not always sufficient for the Israelites. They often deposed the Supreme Being, in the same manner as the Neapolitans rebel against St. Januarius; and not unfrequently insisted upon having another king, and being governed like their neighbours.

There is a remarkable passage in the book of Joshua, which sets this matter in a conspicuous point of view. The Israelites having relapsed into

into idolatry, and fallen into alarming dissensions among themselves, Joshua drew together the heads of the tribes at Schechem, in order to a reconciliation. And the topic he insisted upon for his purpose, was, not that the God of Israel was the only true God, the maker of all things, but that he was, the family God, and the family God only, of the race of Abraham. * But then what of all this? Taking it in its broadest extent, with a due consideration of situation and circumstances, I can see nothing reprehensible in it. Nor can I possibly understand, why the heathen lawgivers, who had their tutelary and family gods, should be invariably spoken well of, while Moses is contemptuously reviled, who, at the worst, ought to be but ranked among other legislators? "Thou hast my wonder, now," said a plain honest man to a philosopher, "my understanding shall come afterwards." The application is not difficult.

"I know some," says Bayle, "who have no obstacle to hinder their believing, that God was the author of the laws of Moses, and of all those revelations, that occasioned so much slaughter and devastation; and that he was the dictator of those abominations of intolerance, so contrary
to

to our clearest ideas of natural equity. The laws of Moses, for instance," says he, "give no toleration to idolaters and false prophets, whom it punishes with death. See, for example, what the prophet Elijah did to the priests of Baal, whom he ordered to be destroyed without mercy. Thus, the literal sense of the laws of Moses, as far as relates to the punishment of opinions, is both impious and detestable. And thus God, in his holy word, is made to have given exceptions to almost all the common notions of reason."

In reply to this, a writer of no contemptible ability* says, "the Israelites, who after initiation into the Mosaical rites, apostatized from the worship of the God of Israel, were proceeded against as traitors and rebels, guilty of no less a crime than high treason. For the commonwealth of the Jews, different in that from all others, was an absolute theocracy; nor was there, nor could there be any difference between the commonwealth and the church. The laws established there, concerning the worship of the one invisible Deity, were the civil laws of that people, and a part of their political government, in which God himself was the legislator. The re-

nouncing

* Locke.

nouncing their king, was throwing off their God; and throwing off their God, was renouncing their king. A tutelary deity was supposed, by the ancients, to be as much matter of election, as a civil magistrate. The people of Israel, therefore, solemnly accepting God as their governor, were bound to the fulfilment of every consequence which followed from the Horeb contract. The rulers of the Jews were merely deputies to their king or God." And thus, Josephus tells us, that Moses did not make "religion a part of virtue, but virtue a part of religion;" meaning thereby, that as in all human societies, obedience to the law, is moral virtue; so under a theocracy, it is religion.

The tracing the parts of religion and morality, by a regular deduction from first principles, in the way of abstract reasoning, is above the capacity of the generality of mankind, and what the most learned are not, perhaps, perfectly equal to. But it is objected to the law of Moses, as I have observed above, that there is no mention made of future rewards and punishments. It is even asserted that Moses did not believe the immortality of the soul, nor the rewards of another life; for if he had, he would have taught them to his people; and Solomon,

the wisest of their kings, would not have decided against them. There is no direct authority, indeed, that I can find, either affirmatively or negatively, on this point; but the most probable supposition, as it appears to me, is, that Moses and the Israelites did believe in a future state of rewards and punishments. It was believed among the Egyptians, and not as a part of the secret doctrine, for it was spread and propagated among the vulgar. It obtained among the Babylonians, and I may venture to say, among all the nations of antiquity of whose sentiments we have any account. Now certainly the Israelites were not taught to believe the contrary. So far was it from being so, that the belief was in process of time, popular among the Jews, and then made as considerable a figure in their annals, as it did in the annals of any other people. Moreover, is it not said of Enoch, "That he was not, for God took him?" The patriarchs called this present life the "few and evil days of their *pilgrimage*." To which may be added the accounts given of the appearance of angels, which would naturally pre-suppose a belief in an invisible world of spirits. Even Solomon, who is said to have decided against it,* expressly declares, "The righteous hath hope in his death," and
makes,

* Bolingbroke. Moral Philosopher,

makes, between the soul and body, this clear distinction, "The body shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God that gave it." He even speaks of a future account, in which "Every work shall be brought into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

The Jews, of whom we are now, however, about to take our leave, passed through the world like other people, until their return from the captivity. It was then they began to assume a consequence as the favoured children of God; and it was then the hatred and contempt of the Greeks and Romans began to oppose their pretensions. "If the Jews," says Celsus, "adhere to their own law, it is not for that they are to blame. But if they give themselves airs of sublimer wisdom than the rest of mankind, and on that score, refuse all communion with us, as not equally pure, I must tell them, it is not to be believed that they are more dear, or more agreeable to God, than other nations.

An unsociableness of temper, and a pride of æct, which is at all times displeasing, unquestionably brought upon the Hebrew people the disgraceful character of *genus hominum invisum deis.*

deis.* Julian, the emperor, and Christian persecutor, says, "The Jews and Christians brought the execration of the world upon them, by their aversion to the gods of the Gentiles. Tacitus's objection to the Christians, was their *odium humani generis*; that is, their refusal of an inter-community of worship. And hence Quintilian says, "that the author of the Jewish religion was deservedly hated, and held ignominious, as the founder of a superstition, which was the bane of all other religions." With this hostile disposition towards other religions, agrees the prediction, that they should, in the course of their story, be distinguished by judgments and calamities above all other nations; that they should be dispersed all over the face of the earth, exposed to universal obloquy, and yet not be utterly lost or destroyed, but still preserved as a distinct people. And we now see the denunciation most signally verified. So that the Jews may even be regarded as a living continued monument of the truth of their own ancient sacred writings, and of the extraordinary facts there recorded. †

The æra is, however, I trust, at hand, when their sufferings shall have an end; and when their days of sorrow shall be brightened into joy.

* Tacitus.

† Leland.

joy. The Christian treatment of the Jews, hath been as merciless and inhuman as that of the Pagan. There is not a nation in Europe, the pages of whose history are not stained with flagitious enormities exercised against this persecuted race. Even at this moment, when the clock strikes a certain hour at Rome, they are crammed into the quarter allotted them for the night. Every week, a sermon is forced upon them by a monk, whose principal business is, to revile the sacred and cherished doctrines of their fathers, and to heap upon their defenceless heads the coarsest epithets of bigotry and opprobrium. Is the compulsory conversion of the Jews necessary to Christianity? Or, is intolerance to be still the striking feature in that high priest of St. Peter's, who calls himself the mild, and the humble representative of the God of mercy? The good sense and charity of Roman Catholics must at length revolt at such unhallowed barbarity. With honest hearts, and unprejudiced understandings, many already begin to see, there should be no such distinctions in language, as Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Dissenter, or Gentile. All are adorers of the same God. Each hopes to be acceptable in his own way; and nothing short of the vanity of ignorance, can

venture to imagine this particular sect selected to be blessed, and that particular sect, sentenced to be damned.

LET.

LETTER LXXXIV.

THE experience of history exalts and enlarges the horizon of our intellectual view. In tracing our species, we find man every where alike. In whatever region, under whatever habits and modes of life he is observed, he is found very little to vary, either in the faculties of his mind, or in the lineaments of his body. In his most forlorn condition, he is the same fisherman, he weaves the same net, he twists the same line, he barbs the same hook. As a hunter, he pursues the same wiles, he employs the same stratagems. As an husbandman, his tillage is laboured in the same order. As a subject, he is the same creature in society. As a warrior, he is the same hero in the field. In a word, take him even in regard to his domestic utensils and instruments (such, I mean, as are of real use) and you will, on the comparison, find how very much the same he is, in every quarter

of the globe. Even in the frippery of ornament, the similitude is to be discerned.

Ancient history has been said to have the same relation to the history of modern times, as an old medal to a current coin. The one is supposed calculated merely for the ornament of the cabinet; the other, to be circulated through the world, for the benefit of mankind. Let us see whether the comparison holds good. And first, let us attend to the sciences. Two sorts of progression are to be distinguished in the sciences; the one less apparent, which is the fruit of genius; the other more sensible, which is the growth of time. The first undoubtedly reflects honour on the ancients; the latter is the just portion of the moderns. The ancients were guided only by their genius; the moderns have the great advantages of discoveries and experience. Would the moderns, however, have been so profound in astronomy, in geometry, in algebra, if Méton, Aristotle, Eudoxus, Hipparchus, Euclid, Archimedes, and others, had not laid the foundation of those sciences, and cleared the way in matters so confused? And, after all the perfection we have arrived at, let me be permitted to ask, if there be a modern, who has carried the force of mechanics

chanics farther than Archimedes; or, if there be surer principles of geometry, than those of Euclid?

In certain points, indeed, it appears—and a happy reflection it is—that the sublimest truths, which among the Heathens only one here and there of brighter parts and more leisure than ordinary, could attain to, are now grown familiar to the meanest inhabitants of Christian countries. In our own improved state of experimental philosophy, also, we might wish, that it were possible to exhibit to the wise men and sages of antiquity, some of those wonderful phænomena, which are now so well known, but which were then totally unknown. To Aristotle, we might give the electric shock. Alexander, we might carry to an artillery ground, well stocked with battering trains, bombs, shells, &c.; and, together with the evolutions and firings of a modern battalion, he might see and hear the exercise of the great guns. To Julius Cæsar, the invader of Great Britain, we might shew a British man of war: and even to Archimedes, we might venture to submit the investigation of a steam engine, or the astonishing powers of an optical instrument.

Yet, it is remarkable, that the inventions, which we so much pride ourselves in, and from which we so greatly profit, have not been the result of scientific researches. They have almost all been found out by persons of little enquiry, or of professions unconnected with the discovery. It was not a seaman who found out the compass; nor a man of letters, the art of printing; nor a soldier, the composition and force of powder. The greater part of modern inventions, have been the effect of hazard. Thus, then, it was certainly as glorious, if not more to the honour of Hipparchus, to carry astronomy to the length he did, without the aid of glasses, than it has been since to those who have gone beyond him, with the prodigious advantage of telescopes. As historians and poets, we certainly do not excel the ancients. On the contrary, those who approach nearest to the ancients, are universally esteemed our best writers.

In modern times, indeed, men have been more experimentally laborious; more eager after knowledge; more exact in their observations of nature; more attentive and profound in their researches, and more universal and communicative. But, Locke is indebted to Aristotle
and

and the Peripatetics, and still more to the Stoics for his best notions concerning the manner in which the soul, on his system, acquires her ideas. Descartes and Leibnitz, took the contrary doctrine of innate ideas, from Plato. Berkeley borrowed his subtle doctrine from similar sources. Moschus, the Phœnician, we are told, laid the foundations of the Corpuscular philosophy. After him, Democritus began to strip bodies of their sensible qualities; but, it was his disciple Protagoras, who fairly drove matter out of the world. Buffon's system of generation and nutrition, is not new: it is that of Anaxagoras, Empedocles, Plautinus, and others. His organic molecules were known to them. The accelerated motion of heavy bodies downwards, was known to Aristotle and the Peripatetics. Lucretius anticipated Galileo in the discovery, that bodies unequal in weight, fall with equal velocity in vacuo. The principle of universal gravitation, and centripetal and centrifugal forces, are plainly indicated by Anaxagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Plutarch, and Lucretius. Even Pythagoras was not ignorant, that the gravitation of the planets towards the sun, was in the inverse ratio of the squares of their distances. Without any optical assistance, Demo-

critus, many ages before Galileo, affirmed, that the milky way was produced by the united splendor of many small stars. Anaximenes taught a plurality of worlds. He believed the stars to be masses of fire, round which certain earthly bodies moved, which were not discernable by us. The plurality of worlds was a favourite opinion. Plutarch assures us, it was maintained by Heraclides, and the Pythagorean school. The Copernican, or true system, the rotation of the planets on their axes, and the existence of antipodes, were known to Pythagoras, Plato, and others. The true nature of comets, was at least happily guessed at. All we conjecture about the moon was conjectured by the ancients, from the time of Orpheus down to that of Plutarch. The weight of the air was known to Aristotle; its elasticity, to Seneca. Timæus was not ignorant of electricity. The Newtonian system of light and colours, and the circulation of the blood, were not, indeed, so well understood. But, the system of generation by *ova*, maintained by Harvey, Steno, and others, is only a revival of ancient opinions: and, what is still more wonderful, the existence of animalcula in semine masculino, on which another, and more plausible system of generation has been founded by Leuwenhoek,

enhock, Hartsoeker, Valisnieri, and others, is clearly intimated by Plato, Hippocrates, and Aristotle, who have said all that could be expected from persons who had not seen the animalcula; which they could not do, because they had not microscopes. The sexual system of plants, was known to the ancients. Aristotle, particularly, speaks of the *farina fecundans* of the palm tree. To conclude, says Dutens, I do insist upon it, there is scarcely one of the discoveries attributed to the moderns, which had not been, not only known, but also supported by the most solid reasonings, by the ancients.*

It is very justly remarked, by a celebrated academician, † “ N’ayant plus aujourd’hui les ouvrages de ces anciens philosophes, nous ignorons quelle méthode ils avoient suivie dans l’arrangement & dans la liaison de leurs idées; leurs systèmes sont pour nous comme des statues antiques, dont il ne reste que des fragmens, & dont nous ne pouvons former un tout, sans restituer les parties qui nous manquent. Nous

* Recherches sur les Decouvertes attribués aux Modernes
par M. Dutens.

† Freret.

devons,

devons, je crois, la même justice aux anciens philosophes, qu'aux anciens sculpteurs ; il faut juger des parties que nous avons perdue, par celles que nous voyons encore ; penser qu'elles repondoient les unes aux autres, & que leur assemblage formoit un tout, qui n'étoit pas monstrueux. Si les modernes ont quelque avantage réel sur les anciens, c'est d'être venus après eux, & de marcher dans des routes déjà frayées ; c'est de pouvoir s'instruire non-seulement par leurs découvertes, mais encore par leurs méprises."

I grant, it would be as unjust not to admire or praise any thing but what relates to the ancients, as it would be not to adopt any thing but what appertains to the moderns. The ancients, indisputably, have taught us much : and though we cannot deny their having transmitted to us great errors, it is yet as certain, that they have transmitted to us great truths. *Ubi plura nitent*, says Horace, *non ego paucis offendar maculis*. Besides sciences, the remains, not only of literature, but those of architecture, and those almost supernatural productions of sculpture, which are now to be seen in Italy, (for instance, the Apollo) shew to what eminence the Greeks were arrived at a very early period of their
their

their history. All that we see at Rome that is valuable in marble, came from Greece. The Romans themselves had scarcely a twilight of good taste. From Greece, they derived all. And what is still more singular, it was from the same soil of Greece, but through the medium of Florence, and the protection of the Medici, that, on the revival of the arts, Europe drew that scientific light, which was so rapidly diffused over every other country. The artists, banished from Constantinople by Mahommed II. took refuge in Tuscany, and there found an asylum.

But it is not alone by the Greeks that we have been instructed. The immortal productions of their disciples, of Cicero, Virgil, and Livy, long silently taught and delighted in cloisters, and flourished even in the shade, during the gloom of ignorance and barbarism. Between the reigns of Augustus and Charlemagne, they were pored over by the retired, the pious, and the learned. At length they became more generally read and admired. Then the emulation of mankind was roused, by the remembrance of a more perfect state; and the flame of science was carefully kept alive, to
warm

warm and enlighten the maturer age of the Western world.* Of the works of the ancients, however, many more have perished, than have reached us: and even most of those that have come down to us, are in fragments, mutilated and imperfect.

The Greeks and the Romans, it must be confessed, were sufficiently proud of their decided superiority. They affected to degrade with the name of Barbarians (the name *Barbara*, by the way, being Sanskreet, and of precisely the same signification with that given it in the Greek †) all the nations beyond the pale of their own respective dominions. The luxurious Persian, in the midst of the pomp and grandeur of the East, did not escape the injury of this contemptuous appellation: nor would they honour the great king with a more respectful epithet, than they would the savage of the woods. Yet, with all this real and imaginary supremacy, (and here it is our turn to boast) they were evidently destitute of many of the articles of life, which, even among the lower orders, are now common in Europe; for example, linen. Hence, Arbuthnot has observed with humour, and, I believe, not without truth,

* Gibbon.

† Wilkins.

truth, that Augustus had neither glass to his windows, nor a shirt to his back.

It has been said, that these celebrated nations are indebted, for a great part of their estimation, not to the matter of their history, but to the manner in which it has been delivered, and to the genius and taste of their historians, and other writers. And I acquiesce in the opinion, so far as regards morality, at least; for we otherwise should not be able so easily to forget the horrors of their vindictive, cruel, and remorseless conduct, particularly to their enemies. At the same time, however, it is to be remembered, that all relations, for instance, concerning the Greeks, before the beginning of the Olympiads, must, from the length of time, and unavoidable mixture of fable with historic truth, be obscure, confused, and imperfect: something like the inscriptions upon ancient edifices, half defaced and eaten by time; the sense and genuine meaning of the defective part being to be picked out only, and guessed at, from the remaining characters.

The materials we are in possession of, for the first periods of the Grecian story, are more copious than

than consistent. If we admit the common chronology, there is reason to believe the scattered fragments were preserved, during *thirteen centuries by oral tradition*. The tales or rhapsodies of the *αῖδοι*, or bards, were succeeded by those of the Cyclic poets.* Composition in prose began with the use of alphabetic writing, about six centuries before Christ. With few exceptions, also, the Greek writers may be pronounced extremely careless in matters of chronology.† Nor would they from vanity, (I always except the sages) qualify themselves by the study of foreign languages, for a more accurate acquaintance with the state of things beyond the precincts of their own little cantons. So inconceivable was their ignorance, that Spain, by some, was looked upon as a paltry town;‡ and Rome was only known to be in a place called Italy, and to have been taken by a people called the Gauls.¶

We have already seen, that the ancient knowledge of the Greeks, was not their own, but borrowed. Aristotle acknowledges this. Diogenes Laertius says, many people assure us, the

* Casaubon.

† Josephus.

‡ Gillies.

¶ Pliny.

Barbarians were those, who first applied to the study of philosophy; and that we are indebted for its origin, to the Magi, among the Persians; to the Chaldeans, among the Assyrians and Babylonians; to the Gymnosophists, among the Indians; and to the Druids, among the Celts. Independent of which, we have evidence, as I have frequently shewn, that none of the more celebrated Grecians, at any time, ventured to appear as teachers, until they had travelled into foreign countries, and had picked up a little of the science of the barbarians. The philosophers, as explorers of new coasts, pushed off on discoveries. During their voyages, their commerce generally was with priests. From the intercourse, they profited to the utmost of their ability; and when they conceived they had gained a competent stock, they returned home, and set up a school, or sect, to instruct their countrymen. Pythagoras and Plato visited Egypt, Thrace, Chaldea, and Italy. Democritus studied under certain Magi of Persia. In a word, Thales, who was considered as the father of the Grecian philosophy, had not only the advantage of an Egyptian, but of a Lydian education.

Even

Even the Grecian communities, which justly claimed the honour of superior antiquity, acknowledged themselves indebted to strangers for the most important discoveries, not only in science, but in agriculture and arts; and contented themselves with the glory of having diffused a borrowed light, over the melancholy gloom of ignorance, which overspread their neighbours.* But national vanity at length produced a material change in the tradition. When the refined descendants of the rude Greeks viewed with complacency their own superiority, in arts and arms, to all nations around them, they began to suspect that the gods alone were worthy to have reared the infancy of a people, who so eminently excelled the rest of mankind. To the gods, then, they transferred the merit of the many useful inventions, communicated by the generous humanity of their ancient visitants.†

Our preceding enquiries have established, beyond a doubt, that the natives of Scythia, of the East, of Syria, and of Egypt, were acquainted with many improvements unknown to the Hellenic tribes. That they had letters before Cadmus, is evident; and that the Pelasgic, Scy-

* Isocrat.

† Gillies.

Scythiac, or real ancient Greek alphabet, was not altogether Phœnician, is equally certain.* Writing, indeed, was not common among the Greeks, till many centuries after they had been invaded from Egypt and the East. From the middle of the sixteenth, to the middle of the fourteenth century before Christ, an inundation of Egyptians, Phœnicians, and Phrygians, overflowed the Hellenic coasts. The first written laws, as I have already said, were given in Greece, only six centuries before Christ.†

On this subject of writing, I have, in the course of our correspondence, been unavoidably, and I am afraid tiresomely, diffusive; but I find myself again unavoidably entangled in it, and I shall be obliged to trouble you with a word more before we finally take our leave.

The more we consider the invention of letters, in truth, the more must be our admiration. It is astonishing, how the faculty of man should ever have been able thus to materialize his ideas; to make his thoughts, by art, visible to the eye, which nature had made intelligible only to the ear. It was creating, as it were, a sixth sense,

* Diod. Sicul.

† Herodot. Strabo.

to supply the imperfection or defect of hearing, by making the voice visible. What applause is not due, therefore, to that painter, who first made his ideas fit to his pencil, and drew to his eye the picture of his mind?

Many learned and pious men have supposed the alphabet to be of divine origin; and several have asserted, that letters were first communicated to Moses by God himself, and that the Decalogue was the first alphabetic writing. But, these opinions have been probably too hastily adopted; for we read distinctly in Exodus, “And the Lord said unto Moses, write this for a memorial, in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua;” and this before the promulgation of the law at mount Sinai. The character made use of by Moses, it is reasonable also to imagine, was that of the Egyptians, the nation with whom the Israelites were accustomed to correspond for so many ages; to the greatest part of whose manners and customs they had conformed; and in whose learning, as the adopted son of the daughter of the king, Moses was thoroughly versed. Especially, also, as Moses speaks of letters, as things of familiar use. “And the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their
their

their names; like the *engravings of a signet*, every one with his name shall they be, according to the twelve tribes."

The Phœnician and the Egyptian letter, indeed, it may be presumed, were nearly the same. They all came from the same Scythiac root. Moses, it is true, might, and it is not unnatural to suppose, did alter the shape of the Egyptian letter; all hieroglyphic writing being absolutely forbidden by the second commandment. Thus, in later ages, as we have seen, those who converted the Celtic and Gothic Pagans to the Christian faith, observed the same caution: and thus, the Runic, which was abused to magical superstition, was changed to the Roman.* Writing, in fact, may be supposed to have experienced a like fortune, through all its various modes, in every corner of the earth. Invented out of necessity, to communicate men's thoughts one to another, it was continued out of choice; next it became mystery and ornament; and at last ended, as it began, in the way of popular information. But, to enquire after the inventors of writing is as useless, if not quite as extravagant, as to enquire after the inventors of speech.

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* Warburton.

The similitude of sounds in the Greek and Phœnician, and even still more the Oriental alphabets is likewise very considerable. The Hebrews pronounce *aleph*, *beth*, *gimel*, &c. The Greeks, alpha, beta, gamma, &c. The Persians, *alif*, *bê*, *gim*, &c. This all carries us back to our fundamental position, the Scythian source, and its different ramifications. But, though we thus satisfy ourselves in regard to the characters of the alphabet, what are we to say to the ten symbolical characters, which are now in such general use in Europe, and with which we can, not only signify distinctly the greatest imaginable numbers, but also be able, by an artful position, and dexterous use of them, to answer the most difficult questions in which numbers are concerned? The Greeks knew nothing of these magical figures. By the Latin writers, they are often called *Notæ Barbaræ*, vel *Barbaricæ*. The Hebrews, Greeks, and all ancient nations expressed numbers by their letters.

The ten numerals are undoubtedly of Oriental growth; but to whom they legitimately appertain, is not quite so certain. They are, however, in general, given to the Arabians; and from them we are said to have received them in Eu-

Europe, about the year 1300; though Doctor Wallis insists on their being of a much older standing, and concludes, they must have been used in England, at least as long ago, as the time of Hermannus Contractus, who lived about the year 1050; if not in ordinary affairs, yet, at least, in mathematical ones, and particularly in astronomical tables. With the Greeks, however, every letter in the alphabet was used to denote some number, and each letter denoted a greater or less number, as it was nearer or more remote from the first letter in their alphabetical order; and no letter, which in the order of the alphabet stands after another, ever denoted a number less than the letter that stands before it. And this may be said of other languages: the Roman, indeed, in this respect, exhibits a singularity.

An anonymous, but an ingenious writer says,*
 “ It is supposed the Romans used M to denote 1000, because it is the first letter of *Mille*, which is Latin for a thousand; and C to denote 100, because it is the first letter of *Centum*, which is Latin for a hundred. But, what reason is there to suppose, that 1000 and 100 were the numbers, which letters were first used to express

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among

* Annual Register, 1758.

among the Romans? And what reason can be assigned, why D, the first letter in the Latin word *Decem*, ten, should not rather have been chosen to stand for that number, than for 500? In my apprehension, the Romans did not, in their original intention, use letters to express numbers. They probably put down a single stroke I for one, as is still the practice of those who score on a slate, or with chalk; this stroke I they doubled, trebled, and quadrupled, to express 2, 3, and 4: thus II, III, IIII. So far they could easily number the minims, or strokes, with a glance of the eye: but they presently found, if more were added, it would soon be necessary to tell the strokes one by one: for this reason, when they came to 5, they expressed it by joining two strokes together in an acute angle, thus, V, which will appear the more probable, if it be considered, that the progression of the Roman numbers is from 5 to 5, that is, from the fingers of one hand, to the fingers of the other, as mentioned by Ovid and Vitruvius.

“ After they had made this acute angle V for five, they added single strokes to it to the number of 4, thus, VI, VII, VIII, VIIII. And then, as the minims could not be farther multiplied without confusion, they doubled their acute angle,

gle, by prolonging the two lines beyond their intersection, thus, X, to denote two fives, or ten. After they had doubled, trebled, and quadrupled this double acute angle, thus, XX, XXX, XXXX, they then, for the same reason which induced them first to make a single angle, and then to double it, joined two strokes in another form, and instead of an acute angle, made a right angle L, to denote fifty. When this 50 was doubled, they then doubled the right angle thus L, to denote 100, and having numbered this double right angle four times, thus, LL, LLL, LLLL; when they came to the fifth number, as before, they reverted it, and put a single stroke before it, thus, LI, to denote 500; and when this 500 was doubled, then they also doubled their double right angle, setting two double right angles opposite to each other, with a single stroke between them, thus LII, to denote 1000: when this note for 1000 had been four times repeated, then they put down LIII for 5000, LIIII for 10,000; and LIIII for 50,000, LIIIIIIII for 100,000, LIIIIIIII for 500,000, and LIIIIIIIIII for 1,000,000."

That the Romans did not originally write M for 1000, and C for 100, but square characters, as they are written above, we are expressly in-

formed by Paulus Manutius; but, the corners of the angles being cut off by transcribers for dispatch, these figures were gradually brought into what are now Roman numeral letters. And here we take our leave of the subject of letters and characters.

When we speak of the Greeks, says Bryant, as far back as we can, and of the rites and religion introduced into that country, we may accede to the account given of them by Zonaras, that, "all these things came from Chaldea to Egypt, and thence were derived to the Greeks." The same is attested by Josephus. What preceded the arrival of Cadmus and other Cuthites, however, is utterly unknown. It is true, there are accounts concerning Erectheus, Erictonius, Cecrops, and other ancient kings; but, they were superadded to the history of Attica. It was, therefore, matter of surprize to Solon, when he was informed by the Egyptian priests of the ancient occurrences of their country, and of the wars of the Atlantians, to find the same names stand at the head of their histories, as were observable in those of Greece. *Και τα των γυναικων και ταυτα*, the names also of their women were the same. Strabo seems to think, likewise, most of the ancient names were foreign,

reign, such as Codrus, Arclius and Cothus; and he is, says Bryant, certainly right in his opinion.*

All this science, however, derived from Egypt and Babylonia, we have, I hope satisfactorily, traced to a higher origin. We have found it take its rise beyond Media and Mount Imaüs, in the upper regions of Asia, and to have belonged to the Sacæ, or Scythians. Scythia, I am ready to acknowledge, was an unlimited, undefined term, under which Grecian ignorance might often have sheltered itself. Whatever was unknown northward, was certainly called Scythiac. But Scythia, as the empire of the Romans, and the still later Gothic and Tartarian empires, was of prodigious extent. I will not say with Salmasius, *Scythia igitur, quæ ad septentrionem, omnes fere gentes evomit*. But I will say, that Timonax, a writer of great antiquity, takes notice of fifty nations of Scythians; and that Mithridates, had twenty-two languages spoken within his territories, most of which were esteemed Scythiac.

The Scythians, indeed, are confined by some, to the regions of Colchis, and all that country
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at the foot of Mount Caucasus, as well as that upon the Palus Mæotis, and the Borysthenes; and they are made a people of Cuthite original, a part of that body which came from Egypt.

Αἰγυπτίων ἀποικοὶ εἰσὶν οἱ Σχυθαὶ διὰ τὸ καὶ μελανοχροαὶ αὐτὰς εἶναι λεγέσθαι.* Many of the Greeks, looked upon these countries, as the northern boundaries of the habitable world. Thus we read of Καυκασὸν ἐσχατοῦντα, Caucasus, the boundary of the world. And hence it happened, that till the conquests of Lucullus and Pompey, these countries to the north-east, were the limits of geographical knowledge. Yet, it is allowed, that these very people, long before the dawn of learning in Greece, did carry on an extensive commerce, and were confessedly superior in sciences to all their neighbours.† Strabo speaks of the mighty Pelasgi, who over-ran Greece. Homer mentions them among the allies of the Trojans, Καὶ Καυκῆνες, δίοι τε Πελασγοί.

The traditions of the Greeks, agree with the authentic records of sacred history, in representing the countries, afterwards known by the names of Thrace, Macedon, and Greece, as civilized at an earlier period than any other portion of the western world. The southern corner

* Schol. in Pindar.

† Bryant.

ner of Europe, bordering on Epirus and Macedonia, towards the north, and on the other side surrounded by the sea, was inhabited above eighteen hundred years before the Christian æra, by different tribes, among whom the Pelasgi and Hellenes were the most numerous.* These moved into different parts of Greece; and, in a subsequent period, scattered themselves into the neighbouring islands, the shores of Asia Minor, and the coasts of Italy. At the distance of twelve centuries, obscure traces of the Pelasgi occurred in several Grecian cities; a district of Thessaly, always preserved their name; their colonies continued, in the fifth century before Christ, to inhabit the southern coast of Italy, and the shores of the Hellespont: and in those widely separated countries, their ancient affinity was recognized in the uniformity, of their dialect and manners. †

In one of the languages of Caucasus, we are told, *pel* signifies elevated; and *lasg*, a chain of mountains. Hence, Pelasgi signified literally nothing more, than inhabitants of a country, intersected by high chains of mountains.‡ This, indeed, is different from the derivatives we had
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* Marm. Oxon. Apollodor. † Herodotus.

‡ Court de Gebelin.

formerly occasion to advert to. But remember, mountains and rivers are often the only records which are left of a nation, whose day is over. "He remembers the falling away of the people. They come a stream; are rolled away; another race succeeds. But, some mark the fields as they pass, with their own mighty names. Some blue stream winds to their fame." *

The Greek, in reality, is a mixture of Scythiac, Phœnician, and Egyptian dialects. A learned antiquary † remarks, that during his compilation of a Greek Dictionary, he had found almost all the primitives derived from the Thracians, and the neighbouring people, or from the Phœnician and Oriental tongues. The Teutonic affords a happy illustration. Πάτερ, Vater; μήτηρ, Mutter; θυγάτηρ, Tochter; πῦρ, fus, the foot; πῦρ, fuer; ῥυθμός, reimen; ἅλς, saltz, salt; νύξ, nacht; λóισθος, letzte, last; εἰσθῶ, stehen, thaw. These examples might be greatly multiplied. Pelloutier says, he saw a manuscript of a man of the most profound erudition, who had collected *two thousand* words, which he proved to be the same in German, as in Greek.

The Greeks, for a long space of time, were undoubtedly the depositaries of Scythiac and Ori-

* Ossian,

† Fourmout l'Ainé.

Oriental learning. They were indebted to the upper countries of Asia for their information; as we are indebted to them for a great deal of which we are in possession. But nothing so satisfactorily establishes conviction on this head, as similarity of religion, blended with similarity of language and manners. The Scythians, and the Greeks, were nearly one and the same in these respects. Even the most diligent enquirers of antiquity, were led to regard, not only the Trojans, but likewise the Lycians and Pamphylians, as scattered branches of the Hellenic nation.* Thus, it is in vain the Greeks have arrogated to themselves, the origin of arts and of sciences. To others, they must yield the palm of first principles. Even the knowledge of bread, wine, domestic animals, colours, metals, &c. with all the most useful and agreeable acquisitions of human society, was charitably conferred upon them by Barbarians. Nay, I might go farther, were I not apprehensive of a world in arms. The Greeks, says Pausanias, enriched their native country with statues and with paintings, taken in the plunder of Troy, and thus introduced a taste for the elegant arts among their countrymen. In the Iliad and Odyssey, we clearly perceive the perfection, to which things of this nature were at that early period

* Gillies,

period carried by the Phrygians. Phidias and Scopas, to whom the ancient great and sublime stile of sculpture belonged, did not flourish till seven centuries after the sack and burning of Troy. Praxitiles, with whom dwelt the elegant and graceful, did not appear for a hundred years afterwards. In the days of Alexander the Great, Apelles and Lysippus shewed themselves. Xeuxis was the contemporary, and the friend of Plato.

It is observed by Celsus, on the words of Plato, that, " the Greeks improved whatever science they received from the Barbarians ; " that the Barbarians excelled in inventing opinions, but the Greeks only were able to perfect and support them. This might possibly have been the case. At least, the Greeks have a title to the reputation, and we have no more ancient remains, by which, on comparison, we can invalidate their pretensions. The Greeks undeniably commenced with a borrowed ray ; but, in process of time, it is equally certain, that they shone with native and unequalled lustre.

In the very early periods of the history of Greece, we see that celebrated people, savage and uncivilized. The conduct of their first heroes is stained with indelible marks of rapine
and

and barbarity. Jason heads a confederacy, which is piratically to ravage the territories of the king of Colchos. Castor and Pollux, the sons of the king of Sparta, join him, together with Peleus, the father of Achilles, Orpheus, the poet, and Hercules, the most illustrious of mortals, and the first of demi-gods. Thus combined, sail these gallant Argonautic knights, plunder in their eye, and licentiousness in their imaginations. But what avails the recapitulation? Let it suffice, that 1560 years before Christ, there was a rich sovereign at Colchos; and that *meum* and *tuum* was as little regarded then, and for centuries afterwards in Greece, as in any other country.

I have not, as we have proceeded, paid any particular attention to the Egyptians, as the parents, though generally reputed such, of the arts and sciences. And you will judge me whether I have been right. Jamblicus tells us, Pythagoras spent two and twenty years in Egypt, studying astronomy and geometry. And yet, after his return to Samos, he himself discovered the famous 47th prop. of the first book of Euclid. This is a very simple theorem; and not having been reached by the Egyptian geometry, shews they had not advanced far in such speculations. So, again, in astronomy: Thales is said to have been the
first,

first, who predicted an eclipse of the sun ; nor did the Egyptians pretend to dispute the honour with him. And yet, the Egyptians certainly taught Pythagoras the solar system in general, and the doctrine of comets in particular. They taught him, however, as they probably had it themselves, not scientifically, but dogmatically, and as they received it from tradition.*

With respect to Homer, we have already been somewhat particular. But, I do not recollect I ever ventured so far as the learned prelate I have just quoted, who says, Homer collected his materials from the songs and poems of his predecessors ; and that his account was evidently taken from *authentic records*, and not from uncertain tradition. The Greeks, indeed, possessing much traditionary, and little recorded information, concerning the antiquities of their country, the great inventors of arts, and generous benefactors of society, have been deprived of their merited fame, and well-earned honours. Their names, however, like rocks resisting the assaults of the ocean, bid defiance to the depredations of time ; yet, of Linus, Orpheus, Musæus, and Melampus, little else than the names remain ; and to determine the time in which they

* Warburton.

they flourished, was a matter of as much difficulty two thousand years ago, as it remains in the present age.*

Homer, who flourished about eighty years after the siege of Troy, and upwards of 800 years before Christ, did not, most probably, find poetry an art still in its infancy. Two remarkable events had long and repeatedly exercised the talents of poets, the Theban war, and the war of Troy. † That he carried the power of the muse, however, to the utmost degree of sublimity, is readily admitted. None of his successors, with all the advantages of his great example, have ever been able to approach him. He dozes, we are told, sometimes. *Quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus*. He may doze; but it is as the eagle, who having roamed through the expanse of heaven, gradually declines, wearied with fatigue, on the inaccessible point of some lofty mountain; or as the repose of his own Jupiter, who awakes with thunder, and manifests an undiminished energy and vigour.

These immortal poems, unknown to the Dorian conquerors of Peloponnesus, were preserved by the Eolians and Ionians, whose ancestors they

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celebrate

* Gillies.

† L'Abbe Barthelemi.

celebrate. Lycurgus, on his return by the coast of Asia Minor, found them, arranged their several parts, transcribed and transported them to Sparta, where, after two centuries of wars and revolutions, the customs and the sentiments described by the divine poet, had been obliterated and forgotten. Herodotus, who read his history at the Olympic games four hundred and forty-four years before Christ, says, "that Homer and Hesiod lived about four hundred years before him." But this does not coincide, by at least fifty years, with the marbles of Paros. It matters not. On this subject we have better evidence than any monuments of marble, or even the testimony of Herodotus. Homer lived near the time he describes. He conversed, in his youth, with those who had seen the heroes of the Trojan war; and in the vigour of his age saw the grand-children of Agamemnon, Ulysses, Æneas, and Achilles. *

* Gillies.

LETTER LXXXV.

SOME of the ancient fathers, from terms ill understood, divided the first ages of the world into three epochs, and have distinguished them by as many characteristics: *Barbarismos*, which is supposed to have preceded the flood; *Scythismos*, from the flood to the building the tower on the plains of Shinaar; and *Hellenismos*, or the Grecian period. But, this was arbitrary. They likewise, but with better reason, looked to the country whence the children of Noah descended, for the seeds of those principles which were to take root and flourish in Assyria, Palestine, Egypt, and Greece. Sanco-niathon, speaking of this people, and of the great works which they performed, concludes with this short but remarkable sentence; Ουτοι δε και Αληται, και Τιτανες καλενται; these are wanderers, and are called Titans.

When and how Greece was civilized, however, is not at present material to our enquiries. Attica is said to have been quite desolated by

human nature, to shew the perfection to which man is capable of rapidly ascending. Hence the Romans drew their knowledge ; *Græco fonte cadunt* ;* and they drank in some instances well, but in others, not heartily of the stream.

The works of speculation or science may be reduced to the four classes of philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, physics, and metaphysics ; and in each of these they excelled. The system which professed to unfold the nature of God, of man, and of the universe, engaged the metaphysical researches of the philosopher, and, according to the temper of his mind, permitted him to doubt with the Sceptics ; or decide with the Stoics ; sublimely to speculate with Plato, or severely to argue with Aristotle. The race of these philosophers was glorious and salutary. Even the disciples of Epicurus, as well as those of Zeno, were taught both to act and to suffer. In the suburbs of Athens, the academy of the Platonists, the lyceum of the Peripatetics, the portico of the Stoics, and the garden of the Epicureans, were consecrated to the exercise of the mind and body. And the experience of ages convinced the Athenians, that the moral character of modest philosophers was not affected by the diversity of their

* Horace.

their theological speculations. On the contrary, notwithstanding their defects, they were justly praised, and universally looked upon as the wisest and most virtuous of their contemporaries.*

I cannot, indeed, (and I believe few are equal to the undertaking) climb up Plato's mystic and endless ladder. As far as a spiritual nature, and matters purely intelligible, are concerned, I think he is clearly to be understood. His dialogues are a dramatic picture of the life and death of a sage; and as often as he descends from the clouds, his moral system inculcates the love of truth, of our country, and of mankind. More than this was not given him. He was stopped, like others of his fellow creatures, on the outskirts of the intellectual world; and therefore having nothing to relate from the evidence of his own immediate senses, he had little more to produce in his abstract lucubrations, than what had often conjecturally fallen to the lot of other speculative travellers.

The Peripatetics, Epicureans, Stoics, and others, under the denomination of dogmatists, insisted upon their having discovered the truth.

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* Gibbon.

The Academics held this to be impossible. The Sceptics were doubtful, and still waited for further light. Had they possessed, however, the first aphorism of the *novum organum* of Bacon, they would have had the only true object perhaps of human inquiry, which limits every man's attainments in knowledge to what he has discovered of nature by observation and experience. "Homo naturæ minister et interpres, tantum facit et intelligit, quantum de naturæ ordine, re, vel mente observaverit: nec amplius scit, aut potest." Yet, their industry and perseverance were undoubtedly amazing. The root of learning is bitter, says Aristotle, the fruit is sweet. The eyes receive light from the air, the soul from learning. There is as much difference between the learned and the unlearned, as between the living and the dead. Learning in prosperity is an ornament, in adversity a refuge.

It has not been long, remarks Bolingbroke, "since the fantastic and fashionable philosophy of Plato and Aristotle began to be exploded. Little by little, however, there arose men who made a proper use of the light, that increased gradually in the orb of science. There were some essays made faintly at first, like those of men, who, emerging out of darkness, were dazzled

as well as enlightened. But, at length others followed, and with greater assurance, like men born in the light, and whose eyes were able to bear a greater effulgence." We are not always, however, I must think, to quarrel with what our nature's frailty may excuse?*" There can be no more a perfect work, than there can be a perfect man. To say, for instance, of any philosophic system that there are faults in it, is, in effect, to say no more, than that the author of it was a man. I crave the noble peer's pardon, therefore, but I cannot help considering every critic, who attacks another's reputation for human imperfection, as the slave in the Roman triumph, who was to cry out to the conqueror, "Remember you are a man."

The religion of the ancients, in its general acceptance, was, I will confess, a philosophical jumble of truths and errors, of respectable traditions and pleasing fictions; a system which flattered the senses, though it revolted the understanding. Every morning a young Goddess opened the portals of the east, spreading freshness through the air, fragrance through the field, and the various tints of beauty through the circle of creation. The Sun, in his refulgent car,

* Horace.

car, conducted by the Hours, flies and fills the universe with existence. Arrived at the retreat of the sovereign of the ocean, Night, the inseparable follower of his course, expands her ebon wings, and busily sprinkles the ætherial vault with bright illumination. There the God reposes himself after his labours; there he abides till the day draws him again to work and to human observation.

The history of man's credulity, is a necessary speculation to those who trace the gradations of human knowledge. It is as a relative of a perfect integral, in which every part contributes to the whole. The first ages of the world did not walk in absolute and inevitable darkness. If we look back as far as history will carry us, we shall find that the practice of religion was neither universally inhuman, stupid, obscene, nor execrable, as it has been represented. The annual oblation of the fruits of the earth, was no other than, an acknowledgement, that whatever was enjoyed in this world is the free gift of Providence. The same may be affirmed of the common sacrifices; the cruelty in which, was just the same then, as is exercised now in every market of Europe: for the slaughtered cattle were not tortured to death, or uselessly burned to ashes; but they were

were dressed for the repast of the rich, and the entertainment of the poor.*

I am aware, indeed, that though many sages, who employed themselves in the study of the heart of man, had sublime and charitable ideas, yet the general system, and the various modes of worship; the tendency of their public feasts and ceremonies; the vulgar soul of the Pagan theology; the very example of the Gods, whose violent passions, scandalous adventures, and abominable crimes, were celebrated in their hymns and odes, and proposed in some measure to the imitation as well as adoration of the people, were very unfit means to enlighten the minds of men, and to form them to virtue and morality.

The extravagancy of the Grecian mythology, as felt by the multitude, however, we are told, loudly proclaimed, that the pious enquirer, instead of being scandalized or satisfied with a literal sense, should diligently explore the occult wisdom which had been disguised, by the prudence of antiquity, under the mask of folly and fable. It was, indeed, a treasure, which derived its value only from opinion; and every artist, who

* Homer:

who flattered himself he had extracted the precious ore from the surrounding dross, claimed an equal right of stamping upon it the name, and figure, most agreeable to his peculiar fancy. This freedom of interpretation, consequently, exposed the vanity of the art: and the philosopher, who considered the system of polytheism as a composition of human fraud and error, could disguise a smile of contempt under the cloak of devotion, without apprehending that either the mockery, or the compliance, would expose him to the resentment of any invisible, or, as he conceived them, imaginary powers.*

The mind has a difference of taste as well as the palate; and you will as fruitlessly endeavour to delight all men with wisdom, with riches, or with glory, as you would to satisfy all men's hunger with cabbages, turnips, or cucumbers; which, though agreeable and delicious to some, are to others extremely offensive. "Hence," says Locke, "it was in vain the philosophers of old enquired, whether *summum bonum* consisted in riches, or bodily delights, in virtue or contemplation. They might have as reasonably disputed, whether the best relish were to be found
in

* Gibbon..

in apples, plumbs, or nuts ; and have divided themselves into sects upon it."

All old philosophers, however, are not indiscriminately to be huddled together. "We have been born once," says the tranquil Plutarch, "we cannot be born twice, and age must have an end. Yet, thou, O man, though the morrow be not in thy power, in confidence of living to-morrow, puttest thy purposes off to the future, and lovest the present. So men's lives waste with delay ; and hence it is, some of us die in the midst of our business. Every man leaves the world, as if he had but newly entered it. We do not take notice that we live. Our life passeth away without the benefit of life. We would not have the life of a wise man to be like a torrent or rapid stream ; nor would we have it like a stagnant pool ; but rather like a river gliding on silently and quietly. We, therefore, hold his pleasure not to consist in inactivity, but to be that which reason secures to him. A sober, and well ordered reason, procures a pleasant and happy life." Thus Similis, an officer of great reputation under Trajan and Adrian, having obtained leave to retire, passed seven years in his retreat, and then feeling his end approach, ordered

dered an inscription to be put on his tomb, that he had been many years on earth, but that he had lived only seven.

From the phrenzy of intemperance, no just appreciation is to be expected. But it is scarcely to be credited, that in allusion to a more sacred scheme, the heathen superstition should be denominated, “not that barren and arid system, in which we can trace nothing but miserable subtilty and weak argument; not that disastrous code, where the haughty dictator, with his eyes bapdaged, and a hatchet in his hand, hews, hacks, and destroys every thing around him.” I am not, indeed, here to contend with uncandid comparisons, or gross misrepresentation: that will be a subsequent task. But I would recommend it to the advocate of polytheism to reconsider, whether its votaries were not also bound by implicit faith, and whether they were not enjoined rigorous observances? Whether, in the mysteries in particular, where they were tenaciously severe, they were not intolerant, cruel, and unjust? And whether at first, cruel and fierce as other savages, they did not offer up human victims to their gods, as in the instance of the Trojans to the manes of Achilles?

I readily

I readily admit, for I firmly believe, that no religion ever existed, which did not propose to inculcate a more perfect observance of the laws of morality, by conjoining religious motives with the political sanction of laws : and consequently, that what Bayle observes, cannot but be considered as the malignant effusions of an irritated mind. "In regard to religion," says he, "we may say to her, as the Roman consul did to the barbarous Cataline ; no enormity has happened, but has had thee for its author, not a crime has been perpetrated without thee : the murder of so many of our citizens, the oppression and plunder of our allies, has, through thee alone escaped punishment, and been exercised with unrestrained violence ; thou hast found means, not only to trample upon law and justice, but even to subvert and destroy them."

The morality of the Greeks, as appears in the writings of their philosophers, who spoke of what men ought to be, not what they were, is not even, in their delineation of it, the most pure and captivating. Nations should not be held in estimation according to their military skill, their conquest, or the external pageantry of imaginary grandeur which attends them ; but in proportion to what they have done in behalf, or for

the good of mankind. Thus, while we admire the simplicity and chastity of the Grecian matrons, which were incomparably praise worthy ; while we approve of the hardy and vigorous education they gave their youth ; their respect, in some instances, for age ; their hospitality ; and all their domestic virtues ; we must still reproach them with maintaining the odious state of slavery ; the abominable law, that enjoined the putting to death those in a besieged city, who were unable to assist in its defence ; their cruelty to prisoners ; and, in almost all their wars, the sanguinary retaliation made on their enemies, only worthy of the most savage hordes : practices which one cannot view, but with astonishment among civilized nations, who spoke the same language, used the same customs, and who formed but one people. *

In certain circumstances, therefore, it is not to be denied, that modern morality is far preferable to the ancient ; that our manners are more gentle ; that the laws of humanity among us are, better known, and those of nature more universally regarded. The law of nations is now, founded on a basis, which does honour to the people of Europe ; and without investigating,
precisely,

* Montesquieu.

precisely, at the present moment, what changes have been occasioned by the difference of religion, I may venture to affirm, that if the goadings of individual misery are lessened in our hemisphere, it is to Christianity alone we are indebted for the change. Prejudices are incident to man. But before we pronounce on those by which a great people might have been governed, it is reasonable to examine them with attention, and to see whether they tended to dishonour human reason, unaided by the light of divine revelation. The wisdom of Socrates, the eloquence of Plato; the profound genius of Aristotle, and the virtues of Epaminondas, are not to be disgraced by the narrow bigotry of sect; or church. Look at them manfully: give them the praise they merit; and remember, fanaticism and superstition alone deserve to be held forth as the objects of hatred and ridicule.

The ancients were not enlightened by revelation. They were consequently at liberty to give a free scope to their imagination, and to search for the ideal good, as their artists did for the ideal beauty. And, whatever was their system with regard to the formation of beings, the laws of motion, and the sublimest doctrines of metaphysics, they were not afraid to divulge them, nor to inculcate them.

them upon their countrymen. Far from restricting the limits of science, the religion, which had been formed by the united acquisitions of mankind, contributed to extend them, and guarded the sacred deposit with which it was entrusted; while at the same time it encouraged genius to wing a bolder flight, and even guided it in the road to science.*

The great foundation of the mythology of the Greeks, was the doctrine of one wise and benevolent Deity, diffusing happiness around, and protecting his creatures by dispensations equally wise and benevolent. It seemed to multiply Deity, indeed; but these various divinities, in reality, implied only the peculiar exertions of the one, in the different operations of nature. God, nature, and man, comprehended the unadulterated whole of their religious belief. There is nothing absurd, or incoherent in this. Where is the ridicule, or the pious offence in the personification of abstract qualities, the sources of our chief benefits, or in different allegorical representations? Or can we conscientiously believe, that men of as much uninspired wisdom as the world ever produced, should soberly create monsters, before whom they were to fall down, and that in the persons

* Le Clerc de Septchenes.

persons of their gods, they would worship vice, and pay homage to guilt.

The too rigid Christian should be cautious when he handles the ethics, and other venerable monuments of antiquity. It is time to demolish the delusions of pride, and the fancies of vain erudition. To what have the profound researches of prejudice tended, but to bewilder, and display the imbecility of reason? Mythology is not a figurative recital of historical events. The Mystagogue did not teach that Jupiter, Mercury, Bacchus, Mars, and the whole rabble of licentious deities, were only dead mortals; who were subject in life to the same passions and infirmities with man; but, who having been on other accounts benefactors to mankind, were deified from gratitude, and thus had their vices canonized with their virtues.*

There were two kinds of worship in the ancient religion of Greece. The first called popular, consisted chiefly in outward forms. It presented to its votaries a wide but fertile field, which every one was at liberty to appropriate; and where each roamed at pleasure without subordination, and without that mutual co-operation or con-

sent which produces uniformity. * The other, or secret, was connected and concatenated; it rested on a sacred basis; it presented a system, all the parts of which corresponded to each other; and far from permitting any capricious innovation, it firmly withstood every attack, even on the most unessential parts of its doctrines. The preparations it exacted, contributed to maintain its purity. It was enveloped in respect and silence, as with an impenetrable veil. †

Among the wise of all ages, it hath always been found necessary to attend to the feeble reason of the rude and indigent, and to make a sort of political composition with error. The Greeks revered their sacred mysteries. They could not prepare for, nor assist at them, but with deep attention of mind, with great purity of heart, and with great reverence and awe. They confessed their crimes, and they went through private and public purifications, long before they could be admitted to initiation. ‡ No man, who was stained with crimes, dared be a candidate for initiation. Nero, emperor and tyrant

* Freret. † Le Clerc de Septchenes.
‡ Apuleius.

tyrant as he was, was forced to desist from presenting himself as such, after he had been the cause of the murder of his mother. In these mysteries, says Tully, the initiated learned how to live with joy, and to die with better hopes : “ Cum lætitia vivendi rationem, et cum spe meliore moriendi.”

The multitude is to be governed more by law than by reason ; but the enlightened more by reason than by law. Hence the populace of the ancients were left to the vulgar interpretation of what was supposed best suited to their capacity ; while the better informed were instructed in the belief of objects of much higher importance. The aim of these ancient and venerable mysteries, says the young but most learned Anacharsis,* is to introduce a spirit of union and humanity ; to purify the soul from the pollutions of ignorance ; to procure the aid of the divine favour ; to arrive at the knowledge and the practice of virtue, and the enjoyment of an innocent life ; to look to a fortunate death, and to have the hope of an eternal recompence. In the course of their initiation, the elect were taught to believe that they were to occupy a chosen spot in Elysium, and to live in the blessed regions of the Divi-

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nity ;

* L'Abbe Barthelemi.

nity; while on the other hand the wicked and the unworthy were for evermore to be plunged into horrors, and eternal darkness.

Fourteen centuries before Christ,* Ceres, it is said, communicated these invaluable treasures of wisdom and happiness to Eumelus and Keryx, two virtuous men, who had received her in the form of an unknown traveller, with pious hospitality. Their descendants continued the ministers and guardians of this memorable institution. She conferred on our ancestors, says Isoërates, the two most valuable presents, which either heaven can bestow, or mankind receive; the practice of agriculture, which delivered us from the fierce and precarious manner of life, common to us with wild animals; and the knowledge of those sacred mysteries, which fortify the initiated against the terrors of death, and inspire them with the pleasing hopes of an happy immortality.†

The mysteries were instituted, as I have said before, to preserve the honour due to the Supreme Being; and their principal object of adoration, under the name of universal nature, was the one unoriginated Being, whose functions as well

* Marimor. Arund.

† Gillies.

well as attributes had been personified. They taught, that the Supreme Ruler governs all things, and disposes of all events; that his eyes behold every action, and even the most secret thought.* They taught the immortality of the soul; and not only instructed men in the art of living well here, but inspired them with the highest hopes respecting an hereafter. The vulgar, says Plutarch, believe that nothing remains after death: but we, initiated as we are in the sacred rites of Bacchus, and witnesses of his holy ceremonies, we know that there exists a future state of reward and punishments.

This religion of the Greeks, let me again repeat it, descended to them from Scythia, and the east, but was engrafted upon afterwards from Egypt. Thus Lucian tells us, the great philosopher Demonax, his friend, had the courage one day to ask the Athenians, why they excluded barbarians from their mysteries, when it was from the barbarians themselves, such as the Thracians, they had received them? The fact is, and the name *μυστήρια* puts it beyond dispute, these mysteries were barbarous or foreign. The word is from the eastern dialects, *Mistur*, or *Mistur, res aut locus absconditus*.†

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Homer

• Chrysippus.

† Warburton.

"Homer and Hesiod," says Herodotus, "were those who made a theogony for the Greeks, gave surnames to the Gods, and adjusted their various and specific attributes and rites of worship." But Herodotus was mistaken for Melampus, whom Homer himself places three generations before the Trojan war, is recorded to have first taught the Greeks the names, the rites, and the mysteries of Bacchus. Homer, as I have already had occasion to notice, gives the title of Divine to the Pelasgi, who were some of these very Thracians. They were universally even stiled *Θεογονοι*, to signify their profound knowledge in sacred things. These Pelasgi, who were also the institutors of the oracle of Dodona, had, however, for a long time, no name for any but the Supreme Divinity. The rude heap of stones, and then the termes, preceded the personification, or the more figurative emblem. Thus, among the early Greeks, we find the *Στυλος* and *Κίον*, which first, corresponding with the Latin word *cippus*, expressed quadrangular, or generally square pillars, on which was inscribed the name of the Divinity. The last indicated merely symbolical columns, though in process of time they were conceived to

injury statues, and in such sense were generally received.

It is lamentable, to see a rational being bow to the workmanship of his own hands; to the image in brass or marble, which, had it been endowed with sense and motion, should rather start from the pedestal, to adore the creative powers of man.* In miserable vulgar Paganism, every thing originating in the fancy and passions, vanity must be devised for the gratification of humour. The God of to-day will not do for to-morrow. The ceremonies too must be changed, and new ones imposed. In short, during the latter ages of polytheism, the earth swarmed as thick with the progeny of heaven, as in the supposed periods of hero-worship, heaven swarmed with the progeny of the earth. And thus the dishonour of religion was veiled, and passion became piety.

But, this was not the religion of all. It is not every Roman Catholic, for instance, who at this day, forgetful of his God, kneels at the shrine of a saint. The enlightened of antiquity did not confound the representation with the original, or look upon their statues as the absolute

* Lactantius.

absolute resemblances of their divinities. Homer, it is true, paints to us Minerva as a beautiful woman ; but, had he meant to say, she was literally to be considered as such, he would not probably have given her that form, to have introduced her to Ulysses. And hence Martial, "*Qui finxit sacros auro, vel marmore vultus, non fecit ille Deos.*" What are cherubims and seraphims, let me ask ? What is Satan, and his fallen host ? The instances, in a word, are numerous, of the intelligent among the ancients, despising the fooleries of idolatry, and prohibiting the use of emblematical representations of the Divinity. Things low and vile, says Plutarch, are not proper to represent the most excellent beings ; nor can the Divinity be figured but intellectually.

We have seen, that the vanity of the Greeks was not at all times tempered by reason, or guided by probability. In assuming to themselves the appellation, Autocthones, the original inhabitants of the earth, and the sole instructed, they boldly had recourse to that species of authority, which would compel without violence, and persuade without conviction, and which, though teeming with absurdity, would soar above the comprehension of vulgar minds. Nay,
even

even when knowledge had opened the eyes of the many, and intercourse with foreign nations had compelled them to renounce such claims, and even to admit, that instead of owing nothing, they were virtually indebted for almost every thing to barbarians; still true to their pretensions, they turned themselves from their forefathers to the Egyptians; gave to the sons of the Nile the post of honour, which they could no longer keep themselves; and complimented these, their fictitious benefactors, with a most extravagant antiquity.

The Greeks had indisputably, as I have acknowledged, an infinite deal to boast of. Compare them even with Rome, the mistress of the world. In the republic of letters, Rome had only the triumph of about a century. Greece had twelve centuries, which she could call her own. Homer flourished before the foundation of Rome considerably; and St. John, surnamed Chrysostom, or golden mouthed, lived towards the conclusion of the fourth age of Christianity, when Rome was again plunged into barbarism. The Greeks, in truth, appear to have been so gifted, that, like their own Midas, whatever they touched immediately became precious; and

and whatever they handled, sprung into per-
fection,

In the fictions of the ancients, and those of the moderns, we cannot, however, avoid perceiving a very extraordinary difference. The former dip entirely in sacred or scientific sources, and thence surrounded by magnificent objects, display the bold wing, which seizes and captivates the imagination. Whereas, the latter, confined to the fairy illusions of transient conceit, leave no impression which can afford satisfaction, or fix the mind in the permanency of belief. All is, I know, by some called fable among the Greeks. This is not, however, the truth : nor can I even admit of the conclusion, that the Iliad is as little founded as the Paradise Lost,

Scepticism has been carried a great length. Yet, though I acknowledge it were absurd to quote the fable of the Iliad, the legends of Hercules, Theseus, or OEdipus, as authorities in matter of fact, relating to the history of mankind ; yet they certainly may be cited, to ascertain the sentiments and conceptions of the age in which they were composed, or to characterise the genius of the people, with whose feelings they were blended.

Is it not more natural to conclude thus, than that they are allegorical; or what is still more preposterous, (and I seriously assure you, the *Iliad*, in particular, has been so called) mystical representations of the Hermetic philosophy? If is true, the heroes are almost all made to descend from divinities; as Achilles from Thetis; Hercules from Jupiter, &c. and all at length, whether the offspring of sea nymphs, or fountain nymphs, or nymphs of whatever denomination; or whether Grecians or Trojans, to link by the genealogical chain to Saturn, the son of Heaven and Earth, as we do to Noah, the renovator of our species. Looking at the origin of the Trojan war, likewise, or taking it, *ab ovo*, according to the expression of Horace, it must also be allowed, there is a fiction palpable and glaring. An egg and an apple are the springs. Jupiter, falling in love with Leda, transforms himself into a swan, and is the cause why, in process of time, she is delivered of two eggs. From these eggs come Helen and Pollux, and Castor and Clytemnestra. Paris, in the progress of the tale, gives the apple to Venus; Venus in return assures him of the possession of Helen, the wife of Menelaus, the loveliest woman existing. Juno and Minerva fret at the preference given to Venus; and vow to be revenged. The whole
conclave

conclave of heaven take part in the quarrel. The struggle becomes tremendous. Priam and his power fall before the implacable hatred of the queen of heaven, and her amazonian ally. Troy is ultimately destroyed.

But, what is this, more than an historical fact treated with the licence of poetry ? As a naturalist, Homer has figuratively represented the energy of the elements. As a philosopher, he has personified the moral attributes, and given to ethics a figure and a form. As a politician, he has laid down the clearest rules for the conduct of the statesman, the general, and the magistrate. And as a poet, he has manifested the inexhaustible resources, the mighty grasp, of a daring imagination, and the exquisite ornament which taste and elegance can scatter over the rudest subject. But, while we say this of the Thracian, as we might of every other Scythian or Celtic bard, we are not to confound it with other poetical fabrics, or to forget, for instance, that another celebrated epic of antiquity is not to come under the like interpretation, I mean the *Æneid*. The *Æneid* is confessedly a fiction. When Virgil wrote, history had assumed her rights ; annalists abounded ; every great man wrote his own memoirs : whence there was

no necessity for the bard of song ; and hence the reason, why the *Iliad* and the *Æneid* are not properly subject to the same mode of explanation.

It has been fancifully remarked by a learned and reverend writer,* that one of the essential prerogatives, or attributes, of a heathen divinity, was the multiplication of an illegitimate offspring. He likewise supposes, on the authority of *Diodorus Siculus*, that it was the custom of antiquity to call the latter heroes by the names of the earlier gods. The doctrine of transmigration, was, he says, the great cause of this ; for it being thought that the same soul passed successively into many human bodies, when they saw an eminent person strongly resembling some ancient character, they were inclined to fancy it the old busy soul, which had taken up its residence in a new habitation. Nay, even the smallest corporeal resemblance was sometimes sufficient to set this superstition at work. Thus, for example, we read that the *Hercules* of Rome and of Greece was not the same, or so ancient as the *Hercules* of Phœnicia ; and that the *Hercules* of the Celts, was not the same as the *Hercules* of the Scythians.

In

• Warburton.

In every fable, and in every fabulous person, some truth is involved. Thus Hercules, whom I have just mentioned, is probably nothing more than the symbol of the sun in general: "The king of fire; the governor of the universe, arrayed in starry splendour:" but in particular, in the vernal season of the year, when he ushers in Phœbe, the lovely partner of his bosom, as the rosy emblem of youth. His twelve labours, are merely the twelve signs of the zodiac. The nine muses, are the nine months of the year, in which man, in genial climates, cultivates the earth. The three graces are the other three months, or, allegorically, affection, pleasure, and repose. The whole of the exploits of Hercules bear evident allusion to the sun. But, whether the sun be in fact represented accurately by Hercules, whom Pythagoras defines to be the energy of nature;* or whether Hercules was only the inventor of the solar year, and the artificial division of the zodiac, I do not presume to say. He, however, was acknowledged in Greece as the invincible hero of his country; the irresistible destroyer of every direful monster, and the powerful dispenser of every good.

* Jamblicus.

All the Gods, if we are to believe Macrobius, had a reference to Hercules, or the sun, or in fact, were symbols of his power. Mithras, whom the Persians generally typified by a bull, designed the commencement of the year, which was then fixed in that sign. Jupiter Ammon, with his ram's horns, was the emblem of the sun, at the vernal equinox.* In the feasts of Osiris, the object of which was certainly to rejoice at the return of heat and vegetation, such symbols were carried : and in other ceremonies among the Egyptians, relative to the change of the equinoxes, the statue of Hercules was carried to the statue of Jupiter Ammon, covered by the skin of a ram;† as much as to say, the equinox, at one place represented by the bull, was at another place represented by the ram. The tetracord, which was dedicated by the Greeks to Mercury, was used to signify the seasons. The seven strings to the lyre of Apollo, were intended to represent the seven planets.‡ One of the names of the sun was Mercury. The heavens were called Argus. The stars with which they are bespangled, were his hundred eyes with which he watched the earth ; hieroglyphically depicted under the figure of a cow : and hence Mercury was the destroyer of Argus. What

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was

* Jablonski.

† Herodotus.

‡ Macrobius.

was this but the sun, which, in extinguishing the brilliancy of the stars, totally banishes them from the sight of man? Again, is it not fact, however curious the coincidence may appear, that the Egyptians and Syrians, for forty days, bewailed the absence and death of Osiris and Adonis; and that the Scythians, and their descendants, in the north of Europe, mourned the absence of the sun for forty days; that his re-appearance, as the finding of Osiris and Adonis was celebrated by similar rejoicings; and that Isis, named in the Edda, Friga, was characterised as in the Egyptian fable, by garments of green, black, and white, or the seasons of the year; for the nations of the north had such an annual division? Adonis also, agreeably to the decision of Jupiter, we know, was to pass, first, four months with Jupiter himself; next, four months with Venus; and then four months with Proserpine. Even Proserpine, we are taught to believe, had the sentence passed upon her, of spending six months upon earth, with her mother Ceres, and six months beneath the earth, in the kingdom of darkness.*

Further, is there not a remarkable analogy between the Hebrew Sampson and the Grecian Hercules?

* Rudbeck.

Hercules ? The ground of all these allegories, consequently, hath, it is highly probable, been laid in hieroglyphical personification. Winter was designed under the figure of Vesta ; harvest under that of Ceres ; Diana represented the chase ; and the ardour of summer was represented in the person of a vigorous youth, radiant in princely glory.* For these personages, indeed, in process of time, fiction forged genealogies, and imagination embodied attributes. To go no farther. What was that shield, which was fabricated by Vulcan for Achilles ? It was divided into four circles ; the two interior represented the heavens ; the exterior represented the sea ; and the intermediate represented the earth. Was this not evidently meant, not only for the world, but the world in its annual progression and vicissitudes ?

As the labours of Hercules may be thus interpreted, so may it warrantably be supposed, that the compartments of the shield are to be thus interpreted. Homer, in his beautifully figurative description, presents us with nothing more than a Grecian calendar, or the symbolical representation of the monthly occupations of the Greeks. Hesiod, though not with the same

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ability,

* Court De Gebelin.

ability, had made a similar attempt some years before. But, what advocate for heroes and demi-gods, in these poetical fictions, can consistently venture to refuse to antiquity, an allegorical language appropriate to itself? What can they say to Jupiter, his scales, and his golden chain; and to Juno, suspended between heaven and earth, and equally attracted to each? The cuckoo, whose form the king of the Gods took the first time he saw Juno, rises above the thunderer's sceptre. Venus has her zone, her car, and her doves. She marries Vulcan. She is faithless, and intrigues with Mars. Prometheus, with the aid of Minerva, creates man. The Paræ dispose of life and death. Æolus has his caverns and his winds. Cupid and Psyche play the extravagancies of love. Ceres has her dragon. Besides these, we have Pan, the Cyclops, Æsculapius, and in short, a million of others. What are we to make of all these whimsical combinations? Are we to suppose Ceres a queen of Sicily; Pluto a king of Ætolia; and Hercules a captain of a ship? Or, are we to believe, that the Gods descended literally from heaven to associate with mortals; that they built cities, and guarded the flocks and herds of rustic monarchs; and that all nature teemed with

with centaurs, minotaurs, sphinxes, satyrs, trytons, and harpies? *

In the fable of the phoenix, we have a still more remarkable instance of astronomical and scientific allegory. This imaginary bird was famous among the ancients, especially among the Egyptians. Arabia was supposed to be her favourite place of residence. There, however, she was allowed to continue only for a limited period. She was then to repair to Egypt, where she was gradually to decline, and there die; and immediately from her ashes was to be a regeneration in the city of the sun,† and on the altar of the God of day. Can any thing be more evident, than that this phoenix was the emblem of a solar revolution, which recommences at the moment of its expiration? And in effect, had not the Syrians a similar tale? The Edda tells us of a Scandinavian phoenix, who, after flourishing a certain number of days, retires into Ethiopia, where she builds her nest, burns herself with her egg, and afterwards re-assuming her shape, bends her course towards the north. These coincidences are not the effect of accident.

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* Court De Gebelin.

† Heliopolis.

“ When I consider the phoenix,” says the learned Bailly, “ bending its flight towards the south, and burning itself in order to its regeneration, I cannot but immediately perceive a solar revolution, and a fable, the invention of a *northern people*.” Add to this, that Ptolemy gives us the observations of the rising and the setting of certain stars, which must have been under the parallel of 49 degrees, and consequently in Northern Asia ; for in that latitude in Europe, science at that time could have made but very little, if any progress.

The mind of man is at all times naturally inclined to personification ; and thus, in the infancy of his inquiries, is very much disposed to conclude, that the stars in the ethereal space, which move in unerring orbits, must be endued with life, and must be sublime and living intelligencies. Hence, in accordance with the number of the planets, came the number of the Gods of the first order in the east. Hence came the seven superior angels of the Persians and Chaldeans ; the seven doors of the doctrine of Mithras, through which souls passed to the blessed regions ; the seven worlds of purification of the Hindoos ; may I venture to add, the seven days creation of the Hebrews ? And what is in uni-

versal practice, the designation of the seven days of the week ; Sunday to the sun ; Monday to the moon ; Tuesday to Mars ; Wednesday to Mercury ; Thursday to Jupiter ; Friday to Venus ; and Saturday to Saturn.*

The names which the planets, indeed, bear now, are not of the highest antiquity. They are of a more modern date. It is worthy, however, of remark, that their number, together with the numbers, twelve, fifty, and three hundred and sixty, were held to be peculiarly sacred ; seven, because it signified the planets, and the days of the week ; twelve, because it denoted the hours, the months, and the signs of the zodiac ; fifty, because it described the weeks into which the year of antiquity was divided ; and three hundred and sixty, because so many were the days in an annual period. Thus also, the mythological account of the seven sons of Rhea ; the seven daughters of Astarte, and the seven reeds of the syrinx of Pan ; the twelve labours of Hercules ; and the twelve amazons whom he killed ; the fifty sons of Hercules, the produce of fifty sisters ; the fifty daughters of Danaus king of Argos, called Danaïdes, and their fifty cousins, sons of Egyptus, whom they

T 4 married ;

* Astronomie Ancien.

married; the fifty Pallantides, who were all slain by Theseus; the fifty black and white nails which ornament the throne of Isis; the three hundred and sixty priests of Lybia, who pour water into three hundred and sixty urns, which they notwithstanding are never able to fill; and finally, the three hundred and sixty cubits in the circle of gold of Osymandias.

We will here conclude. You remember the *Mensa Isiaca*, at Turin, so called, because Isis seated is the principal figure. This is one of the most celebrated Egyptian monuments in Italy. Isis, if I recollect right, is represented with the horns of Apis, or the emblem of fecundity. What do you think have been the explanations of the engraving on this plate of copper? Herwart supposed it to represent the properties of the compass; Pignorius found in it the principles of philosophy and politics; Kircher, the mysteries of religion; Rudbeck, a calendar; and Jablonski, the arrangement of the Egyptians, agreeably to the disposition of the Roman year. Now, do not say that I am more chimerical, though certainly less learned, than these worthy and profound antiquaries. My reasonings may not be correct; but I cannot think them merely founded on conjectural extravagance. I see, or fancy I

see

see truth, in these allegorical grounds of anti-
quity; and therefore, notwithstanding the fiction
which obscures it, I feel neither reluctance nor
hesitation in exploring my way, and endeavouring
to approach it as near as I can.

LETTER LXXXVI.

TIME buries the memory of nations. It is, therefore, probable, that the people we hear the most of, are those who last mounted upon the stage, and whose little strut has scarcely had time sufficient for obliteration. The Roman story we know much of, for it is but of recent date. But that of Etruria, whose dominion, notwithstanding, extended to the Alps, on one side, and to Latium on the other, and was bounded only by the Adriatic and Tuscan seas,* we are very little acquainted with. Etruria was of great consideration, while Rome had not an extent to boast of, so circumscribed even as the present little republic of Santo Marino. Herodotus tells us, the Etruscans were called Tyrrhenians by the Greeks. Sophocles calls them Tyrrhenian Pelasgi. "Umbrorum gens antiquissima Italiæ existimatur."†

Rome,

* Livy.

† Pliny.

Rome, before it was burnt by the Gauls, was merely a parcel of cottages, not excepting even the *Regia Tecta* of Romulus. That conflagration, by consuming the humble huts of the clan, served conveniently to conceal from posterity the poverty of their origin.* For four hundred and seventy years, says Pliny, that is, to the time when Pyrrhus entered in arms into Italy, the houses were covered with shingles and deals: "*Scandula contextam fuisse Romanam, ad Pyrrhi usque bellum, annis 470.*" Yet as Seneca well observes, "*Nullus angustus est locus, qui hanc tam magnarum virutum turbam capit.*"

Livy, indeed, would lead one to suppose that the Roman ignorance was excessive, to the very end of the fifth century of the city, for even then the law was in force, for driving nails for the commemoration of extraordinary circumstances. But, this could have been nothing more than an adherence to a long established and popular custom. The multitude, perhaps, were ignorant of letters. But, it cannot be conceived, with Etruria on one side, and Græcia Magna on the other, both of them enlightened countries, that the Patrician and the Equestrian

* Florus.

Equestrian orders could have been uninstructed. Pythagoras had taught in Magna Grecia, it is probable, during the reign of Numa, though some historians place him about the time of the elder Brutus. Cicero is of this latter opinion; at the same time, however, he is confident that the ancient Romans were well acquainted with the sciences.* This we cannot doubt of, that the best part of the civil, military, and religious institutes of the Romans were established during the government of the kings; that Numa left writings, which, it is recorded, were found in his tomb in the year of Rome 571; and that Pythagoras, certainly on a reforming principle, dissimilar only in subject to Saint Patrick and Ulphilas, preached to the good people of Crotona for upwards of twenty years.

The Etruscans are supposed by some to have derived their civilization and knowledge from the Phœnicians; and as a people, they, like the Romans, are called Celtic-† Others, however, are of opinion, that it was from the Pelasgic-Scythians, the Etruscans derived not only their rudiments of civilization, but the first principles of sciences and arts, and their alphabetic characters,

* Tuscul. 4.

† Pelleutier.

characters.* Architecture, engraving on stones, painting, and poetry, were known to the Etruscans; and this, it is asserted, while Greece was still in an uncultivated state, and while there was no sort of communication, either by land or by sea, between the two people.† The Romans undoubtedly borrowed their manner of building, their science of divination, their pageantry of lictors, ivory chairs, and purple garments,‡ their races of the circus, and their theatrical exhibitions, from Etruria. The Circus Maximus was even built by Etruscan artists.

It is scarcely necessary to mention to you, the *Eugubian Tables*, which are, with great probability, said to have been engraven 247 years before Hesiod. You remember their translation in the *Musæum Etruscum*. Neither is it in any manner essential, to prove that these brass plates of Eugubian lamentations, could not have been the first work composed by the Etruscans, then so evidently acquainted with letters. You may not, however, be informed, that this Etruscan nation of oriental culture (whose dresses, by the way, on their vases, whose rings, bracelets, and other little

* D'Hankerville.

† Thucydides.

‡ Diodorus Siculus.

little ornaments, are perfectly Hindostanic, as are even those at Portici, which were dug out of Herculaneum and Pompeia) were so powerful before the times of the Romans, that they gave their name to the two seas of Italy. The one they called Mare Tuscum, and the other bore the name of one of their colonies, Hadria, or Mare Hadriaticum.* You cannot forget, that when Volsinium, now Bolsena, was taken from the Etruscans by the Romans, 265 years before Christ, no less than two thousand statues were transported thence to Rome.†

Now, though Romulus was educated in the manner of the Greeks, and though the Tarquins were decidedly Corinthians; yet Numa Pompilius, being a Sabine and a Celt, and consequently averse to symbols, and figurative representations, we are to look to the Etruscans for the first material divinities that were adopted by the Romans. Moreover, to whom else are we to give the remains of the common sewers at Rome, the Cloaca Maxima, which, indeed, is at present concealed, except in one or two places, as that in the Forum Romanum, and that which goes into the Tiber? These, during the midst of the Roman greatness, were still reckoned among

* Livy.

† Winkelman.

among the wonders of the world;* and yet they are said to have been works of the elder Tarquin, whose territory did not extend in any direction above sixteen miles; and consequently, on this supposition, they must have been made to accommodate a city, that was calculated chiefly for the reception of cattle, herdsmen, and banditti.

Rude nations sometimes execute works of great magnificence, as fortresses and temples, for the purposes of war and superstition; but seldom palaces, and still more seldom, works of great convenience and cleanliness, in which, for the most part, they are long defective. Livy acknowledges, that the sewers were not accommodated even to the plan of Rome, as it was laid out in his time; they were carried across the streets in all directions, and passed under buildings of the greatest antiquity. In the reign of Augustus, it is said, the course of seven rivers was turned into these subterraneous passages. Even Agrippa, his son-in-law, the *curator perpetuus aquarum*, and the builder of that superb aqueduct near Nismes, the Pont du Guard, passed with his attendants in barges from one end to the other of these sewers. To whom then

* Livy.

then are we to give this stupendous work, anterior probably to the settlement of Romulus, if we do not to the Etruscans, or perhaps to some still more early a people? "It may have been the remains," says Ferguson, "of a more ancient city, on the ruins of which the followers of Romulus settled, as the Arabs now encamp on the ruins of Balbeck and Palmyra."*

We walk, indeed, in this world, not unfrequently, as if we walked on the ruins of another earth, and as if we were the only persons who had survived the wreck. Nay, we might sometimes almost fancy we were left alone on the globe. Ascending the cliff, you enter a mossy cavern, which hangs over the dashing surge. There you picture to your mind the instability of human affairs, and not unaptly compare it to the fluctuation of the sea, as it dashes to and fro beneath you. At one moment, you forget the rude scenes of nature, the rocks and torrents, and plunge into all the wide field of whirlwind and battle. Again, you quit the sublime, its awful and serious emotions, and all its images of trouble, horror, and distress; and serenely glide from the paths of blood, into the verdant bowers, of science and tranquillity. It is soothing, thus
to

* Roman History.

to contemplate the phantoms of past nations ; to apply the lesson, or warning, of each page of history ; and to learn to admire, perhaps to imitate, the examples of a brighter period.

About the year of Rome seven hundred and fifty-one, is fixed by the vulgar computation, the commencement of our æra at the birth of Christ ; an event not calculated to have an immediate influence on the transactions of states, or to make part in the materials of political history, though destined to produce, in a few ages, a total change in the institutions, manners, and general character of nations. Varro, indeed, makes the foundation of Rome 754 years before Christ. But, so little chronological accuracy can be found in the early history of Rome, that Newton has brought it even so low as the year 627. However this may be, the city, on its being founded, was called *Roma*, from the Greek word *Ρωμα*, force. Is there not a tradition, however, that some such person as Janus, Saturn, or Hercules Evander, had his seat of government on this identical site of Rome, thirteen or fourteen hundred years before our Saviour ? Janus, in particular, if I recollect right, is said to have been a chieftain of Italy, whose knowledge of past things was so remarkable,

and whose foresight was so unequalled, that he was represented with two faces, or a bifrons.

No nation is so unfortunate, as to think itself inferior to the rest of the world. Few are even contented with the claim of equality. The greater part, having chosen themselves, as at once the judges and the models of what is excellent in their kind, are first in their own opinion, and give to others consideration or eminence, so far only as they approach to their own condition. One nation is vain of the personal character, or of the learning of a few of its members; another of its policy, its wealth, its commerce, its gardens, and its buildings; and they who have nothing to boast, are vain, because they are ignorant. The Russians, before the reign of Peter the Great, thought themselves possessed of every national honour, and held the *Nemei*, or dumb nations, (the name which they bestowed on their western neighbours of Europe) in a proportional degree of contempt.* The map of the world, in China, was a square plate, the greater part of which was occupied by the provinces of that great empire, leaving on its skirts a few obscure corners, into which the wretched remainder of mankind was supposed

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* Strahlenberg-

to be driven. If you have not the use of our letters, nor the knowledge of our books, said a learned Chinese to an European missionary, what literature, or what science can you have? *

When the Greeks began to multiply their numbers in Peloponnesus, and the islands of the Archipelago, they sent abroad colonies, who settled on the shores of the lower Italy, and carried on some commerce in its ports. Out of the emigrants from this country, and probably out of the emigrants and vagabonds of all other countries, Romulus collected the founders of Rome. The mixed manners, and the mixed language of the Romans, proved this their compound origin, and furnish a kind of demonstration, that this illustrious nation derived their blood from the Celtæ, blended with foreign and Scythiac branches. "*Veresimile Barbarici etiam generis reliquias nonnullas e vicinis et priscis incolis cum Græcis se conjunxisse.*" †

It was a common custom for the Greeks, as history informs us, to have sanctuaries. "*Crebrescebat Græcas per urbes licentia atque impunitas asyla statuendi.*" Temples, sanctified buildings, tombs, sacred groves, all afforded protec-

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tion

* Gemelli Carceri.

† Dion. Halicar.

tion to every sort of crime and abomination. They were open at all times, and granted shelter upon all occasions. They were precisely, and I blush while I say it, what the scandalous protections afforded by churches, and the hallowed residences of certain characters at Rome, are at this day. Romulus's asylum, however, at Rome, was still upon a more considerable scale. His was for the refuse of the earth ; and formed an aggregate for the foundation of an empire. And it is somewhat singular, that it was not until the reign of Augustus, that Romulus's temple of safety, which he erected between the Tarpeian rock and the Capitol, and whence he drew his morality and his subjects, was totally demolished.

The gathering of desperate tribes, is like the physical gathering of disastrous vapours, which, thickening into clouds, at length generate storms, and mark their course by devastation. Nor, in truth, should we, perhaps, confine ourselves entirely to desperate tribes. In the wretched chronicles of human ambition, tear away for the moment the foul imposition ; strip the purple from the shoulders of the most renowned politicians, and remark their progress with the candour of equity, but with the energy
of

of justice :—what are they ? Little less direful, I am afraid, in their civilization, than the others in their barbarity. Nay, in the sight of reason, perhaps, more flagitiously wicked. Barbarian plunderers, in emerging from poverty, may find some apology for their excesses. But, accomplished, wealthy, luxurious heroes, are nothing better than magnificent murderers, and in fairness should be ranked with the vilest and most pernicious of their species.

A philosopher may deplore the eternal discord of man, but he must confess at the same time, that the desire of spoil is a more rational provocation, than the vanity of conquest. In the commencement of society, so much was wanting, that every thing was to be attempted. The principles of action are vigorous, and independent ; and the object to be pursued, though manifestly unjust, is perhaps too essentially necessary to happiness, if not to existence. The grass never grows, as it has been figuratively said, on the spot, where the horse of the man in want has trodden. The Romans were eternally at war. Their historians inform us, the Temple of Janus had been shut only twice, from the foundation of the city to the reign of Augustus. For above 700 years this ambitious people had been em-

ployed, almost without intermission, in establishing their empire by the destruction of their fellow creatures. So wicked were even the maxims of their administration, that to attain a doubtful object of political interest, the laws of nations, and the sacred rights of hospitality, were inhumanly and invariably violated in the face of the world. It is even difficult for annalists, as they confess themselves, to vary the narrative of their crimes.* When all the earth was laid desolate, this merciful people called it peace. Thus Galgacus, “Ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem vocant.”† This was called civilizing the world. But, real civilization is the conferring knowledge and information, blended with humanity and virtue. Under the oppressive aristocracy of the Romans, two-thirds of the human race were condemned to servitude; cultivated, it is true, in some instances, by science, and polished by arts; yet, with all these advantages, most completely miserable, as wretches liable at every moment to the vicious sports of cruelty and caprice. The brutality of the Spartans to the Helots has always, except with savages, been held in abomination. In Rome, a slave, chained at the gate of every great man’s house, gave admittance to the guests invited to the feast.

The

* Gibbon.

† Tacitus.

The Romans, held their individual consideration to be increased by their number of slaves. Hence, we read of some who possessed more than twenty thousand. The prisoners taken in war were disposed of by auction. For a long time the privilege of life and death was in the master. At all times, the utmost severity of corporal punishment was entrusted to his discretion, and the evidence of the slave was on no account to be admitted against the lord. In one part of the Roman story, we are even told, the Romans had brought themselves to that pitch of madness, that they conceived that they could ensure the favour of the Gods, by the adulatory shedding of their own blood, for a long and prosperous life of the prince. At least in this manner certain inscriptions have been interpreted : “ Devotus numini majestatique ejus. D. N. M. Q. E.”

The origin of gladiators, *gladiatorii ludi*, is derived from the horrible custom of immolating the captives of war at the tombs of those who had been slain in battle. The ghosts of the dead were supposed to be rendered propitious by human blood. This was to appease the manes. The Romans borrowed it : “ Romani a Tyrrhenis morem hunc acceperunt.” The Greeks had

the same abominable custom; but, that the cruelty might be less shocking, they, instead of an unmeaning sacrifice, made their captives fight and destroy each other. "Moris erat in sepulchris, virorum fortium captivos necari, quod postquam crudele visum est, placuit gladiatores ante sepulchra dimicare, qui à busti cineribus, bustuarii dicti."* The celebrated Junius Brutus, was the first Roman who rendered this ferocious honour to the ashes of his father, in the year of the city 490. "D. I. Brutus, munus gladiatorium in defuncti patris memoriam edidit primus."† The custom afterwards became common. Individuals, in their wills, left orders, that these bloody spectacles should be exhibited.

At first, it was usual to murder slaves in cool blood; and thence the transition to the splendid shows of voluntary combats. Not only were the people treated with these combats by the great and opulent, but the very priests had their *ludi pontificales*, and their *ludi sacerdotales*. The victims previously swore to fight till death; or on failure to suffer death in the most excruciating torments. Dreadful wounds or exhausted strength were never sufficient to

save

* Servius.

† Livy.

save the life of a combatant. The victor was not permitted to grant his adversary's life, without the leave and approbation of the multitude. The holding up of the fingers by the spectators in a particular manner was sufficient. The gladiators well knew it; and no sooner did they perceive that it sentenced death, than they immediately presented their throats to receive the last stroke from their antagonists. Sometimes the conquerors were made to plunge their hands into the bloody gap whence life had issued, lest the blow should not have been deep enough. A well informed writer even goes farther. "*Nam cum in gladiatoris occisi vulnus, manum mississet, ad caput sibi detersit.*"*

These dreadful games lasted near six hundred years among the Romans; and horrible indeed it is to think of them. Yet, if any thing could give satisfaction in the recollection, it would be, that the Arena, so called from its being covered with sand for the absorption of the blood, was sometimes covered with not only knights, but senators, armed as *secutores*, with their sword and buckler, to keep off the net of their opponents, the *retiarii*. Nero is said, at one show, to have exhibited four hundred senators, and six hundred

* Lamprid.

dred knights. The bestiarii, were another order, who were selected for wild beasts. And this barbarous usage also, we are told, came from the Greeks. "Hunc ludum crudelem Athenienses primum ad civitatis suæ produxére culturam, justitiâ permittente divinâ,"*

I do not mean to accuse the Romans of more cruelty than the Greeks; the Greeks than the Phœnicians; or the Phœnicians than the Jews. The whole world of antiquity, was a tissue of blood and devastation. From the historical books of the Old Testament, we see, that "David gathered all the people together; and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it. And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and made them pass through the brick kiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon."† The Saturn, or as he is stiled in Scripture, the Moloch of the Carthaginians, is sufficient to evince the Carthaginian character. To this sanguinary Divinity children were sacrificed. They were burnt in a fiery furnace, or in a blazing image of the Divinity. Mothers claimed it as a merit, and as part of their duty, to view the spectacle

* Cassiodorus.

† Samuel xii.

spectacle with dry eyes, and without so much as a sigh; for if a tear or a sob escaped, the sacrifice was less acceptable to the God, and all the effects were irrecoverably lost.* This strength of mind, or rather this unnatural barbarity, was carried to such excess, that mothers would endeavour, even with kisses and embraces, to drown and stifle the cries of their little helpless babes; “*Blanditiis et osculis comprimebant vagitum, ne flebilis hostia immolaretur.*”† “Two hundred innocents of the first families in Carthage,” says Diodorus Siculus, “were thrown into the flames in one morning.”

“The authority of a father, and a master of a family, is such,” says Aristotle, “that in whatever manner he may conduct himself, he cannot commit any act, in which he is not justified, towards his slave and his child. What humane morality this for the prince of philosophers! ‡ Among the Romans, cruelty and brutality were so predominant, that we are assailed by them in every page of their history. Anthony, having ordered Cicero to be beheaded, and the head to be brought to him, viewed it with savage pleasure. His wife, Fulvia, laid hold of it, struck it on the face, uttered many bitter execrations, and

* Plutarch.

† Minut. Felix.

‡ Grotius.

and having placed it between her knees, drew out the tongue, and pierced it with a bodkin.

In all their ambitious contests, what massacres, and what horror ! Behold Sylla, coolly proscribing thousands and ten thousands : Marius, on the other hand, dealing out merciless retaliation : Spoletum, Interamnæ, Florentia, Sulmo, Præneste, Nola, Volaterræ, all by one order of Sylla, razed to the ground, and the inhabitants extirpated : the Samnites, to a man, massacred or banished ; even their descendants, yet unborn, deprived for ever of the privilege of arriving at office or distinction. Thus, as Sallust expresses it, “ manifesting himself the first of the human race, who ever prepared punishment for those not yet in existence, and fixed legal incapacity on the child in the mother’s womb.” Observe Lucullus in Spain. At the siege of a city, the besieged, represented by their most venerable citizens, repair to his camp with olive branches, and comply with his terms, by paying him an hundred talents of silver, giving him hostages, and admitting two thousand of his men as a garrison. How is the Roman faith preserved ? The gates are opened by the garrison to the whole army ; and the inhabitants are butchered, without distinction of age or sex.

Twenty thousand persons, credulous from a principle of honour, are left dead upon the spot; while Lucullus, enriched with spoils, exultingly looks forward to a triumph. Seroclius Galba, another Roman general, in the province of Lusitania, issues an order of indiscriminate murder against the whole people. Read Appian's history of the civil wars: it exhibits a matchless scene of massacres, proscriptions, and forfeitures; the leaders sacrificing their best friends, for liberty to wallow in the blood of their enemies; as if human slaughter were the ruling passion of man. Even during the reign of the great Constantine in Gaul, which seems to have been the most innocent and virtuous period of his life, after a signal victory over the Franks and Alemanni, several of their princes were exposed, by his order, to the wild beasts in the amphitheatre at Treves, and the people seemed to enjoy the spectacle, without discovering in it any thing repugnant to the laws of nations or of humanity.* A great number of the Gallic youth were likewise exposed to the same cruel and ignominious death.†

If we thus consider the Romans impartially, much of our admiration of them must abate. When we contemplate them, for instance, with-
in

* Eutropius.

† Panegy. Veter.

in their own walls, what do we see but the dangerous convulsions of an ill-regulated policy? When we regard them in respect to foreign kingdoms, to what are they in reality entitled, besides abhorrence and indignation? This, I mean, as applicable to their national character. As individuals, I pay the highest veneration to many that rose up among them. Who is there but must respect the Academic Cicero, the Stoic Cato, the Epicurean Horace, the Pythagorean Ovid, and the Platonic Virgil? At the same time it is unquestionably true, that the false notions they had embraced concerning the glory of their country, taught them to subdue every affection of humanity, and extinguish every dictate of justice, which opposed that destructive principle.

It was once in England seriously proposed to Cromwell, that all the records in the Tower of London should be burnt, that all memory of things passed should be effaced; and that the whole system of life should commence again. It would be well, perhaps, on similar grounds, for the Roman reputation, could such a disposition be made of many of the annals of the Roman empire. At least, as they often made gods of their bodily diseases, “Romani pro diis, habu-

erunt sacra mala, Rubiginem, Pallorem, and Febrem,"* so it might be conducive to their reputation, could their barbarity, avarice, and injustice, be transfused into divine intelligencies, by whom they might be exonerated from the indelible turpitude of their crimes.

Do not accuse me of being wantonly or outrageously severe on the Roman character. The deductions I draw are from indisputable data. Every chapter, every page, I had almost said every word in their history, is a speaking monument of their atrocities. Will you condemn me, then, for not bowing to what I cannot honestly but abhor; "*Homo sum, humani nil a me alienum puto.*"† Who can with one hand stab his neighbour, or wantonly murder a whole people, and yet with the other dress an altar to the goddess of mercy, concord or peace? When we would brand an enemy, says Liutprandus, with the most disgraceful and contumelious appellation, we call him a Roman; "*Hoc solo, id est Romani nomine, quicquid timidatis, quicquid avaritiæ, quicquid luxuriæ, quicquid mendacii, immo quicquid vitiorum est comprehendentes.*" This may, indeed, be an exaggeration;

* Lactantius.

† Terence.

tion; but in some traits, the likeness is too striking to be mistaken.

The Roman empire was of enormous magnitude. The dominions of Augustus almost surpassed the most enlarged conception we can form. It contained within itself, and in an entire and obedient condition, what had been the seat or territory of many famous republics, and extensive empires; and what has since, in modern times, upon the revival of nations, become the dominions of no less considerable states, and great monarchies. It swallowed up the states of Italy, Greece, Macedonia, the Lesser Asia, Syria, Egypt, Carthage, Numidia, Spain, and Gaul to the Rhine and Danube. Our modern kingdoms are fragments, or shreds, of the vast territory of which it was composed. Even senators, had estates in the most opposite corners of the earth; half a county in Britain, a province in Cilicia, a principality in France, a little kingdom in Africa, a snug retirement of a few thousand acres in Celtiberia, and a score of villages in Italy.

Yet, singular as it may appear, if we review the general state of the imperial forces in Augustus's

thus's time, of the cavalry as well as infantry ; of the legions, the auxiliaries, the guards, and the navy ; the most liberal computation will not allow us to fix the entire establishment by sea and land at more than four hundred and fifty thousand men : a military power which, however formidable it may seem, was equalled by a monarch of the last century, Louis XIV. whose kingdom was confined within a single province of the Roman empire. * And what, perhaps, is still more worthy of remark, the Roman world, in 1390, was contracted to a corner of Thrace, between the Propontis and the Black Sea, about fifty miles in length and thirty miles in breadth;† and in the very spot, whence the Scythiac Pelasgians, upwards of two thousand years before, had descended to instruct and enlighten both Grecians and Romans, as well as the other western inhabitants of the earth.

There is among nations a kind of spontaneous return to obscurity. Reverses of fortune are the common materials of history. The progress of societies to what we call the heights of national greatness, is not more natural, than their return to weakness is unavoidable. And thus the images of youth and of old age have been ap-

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plied

* Gibbon,

† Ducas,

plied to exemplify the successive condition of nations. Communities, like men, have been supposed to have a period of life, and a length of thread, which is spun by the fates in one part uniform and strong, in another weakened and shattered by use ; and to be cut, when the destined æra is come, in order to make way for a renewal of the emblem in those who may arise in succession. Carthage being so much older than Rome," says Polybius, " had felt her decay so much the sooner ; but Rome also carries in her bosom the seeds of mortality."

The image, indeed, is apposite ; and the history of mankind renders the application familiar. But the real case of nations, and that of individuals, is different. The human frame has a general course : it has in every individual a frail texture, and limited duration ; it is worn by exercise, and exhausted by a repetition of its functions. But in society, whose constituent members are renewed in every generation, and which hence seems to enjoy perpetual youth, and accumulating advantages, we cannot, by any parity of reason, expect to find imbecility, connected with mere age and length of days. *

Yet

* Ferguson.

Yet slender is the tie, by which government is upheld. The dispositions of the moral, are sometimes operated upon even by those of the physical world. An acrimonious humour, falling on the single fibre of one man, may loosen or disperse the happiness or the misery of nations. Thus observes an historian,* speaking of tyranny: "A being of the nature of man, endowed with the same faculties, but with a longer measure of existence, would cast down a smile of pity and contempt on the crimes and follies of human ambition, so eager, in a narrow span, to grasp at a short-lived and precarious enjoyment."

The most absolute monarch, in some fatal moment, may dread the reason, or the caprice of his slaves. Nor can it be otherwise than gratifying, to observe the triumph even of rebellion over the despotism that has disdained to listen to the prayers of the oppressed. Though what is gained in extent is supposed to be lost in security, and though the Roman empire itself sometimes received its master from its most barbarous extremities, and from the nurseries of brutality and ignorance; such was the consistency of this mighty fabric, that the military ardour, which kindled the brand that had filled the world with

its flames, took many centuries before it was entirely extinguished.

In the declining age of the empire, the rapid and perpetual transitions from the cottage to the throne, and from the throne to the grave, might, indeed, have been capable of amusing the unfeeling philosopher. But, the man who loved his fellow creatures, could not have remained indifferent amidst the general calamities of his species. The election of these precarious emperors, their power and their death, were equally destructive to their subjects and adherents. The day of their inauguration, was very generally the last day of their happiness. They were imprisoned in the palace; and to use a lively expression of Sidonius, after passing a sleepless night, they sighed, that they had attained the summit of their wishes, and aspired only to descend from their dangerous elevation.

The disastrous period of the fall of the Roman empire, may be justly dated from the reign of Valens, A. D. 376. About seventy years before that period, Africa and Britain, the Rhine, the Danube, and the Nile, furnished their respective trophies, in the triumph of Diocletian

clavian and Maximian. And in the eyes of posterity, this triumph must be remarkable, for it was the last Rome ever beheld. Soon after this, the emperors ceased to vanquish, and Rome ceased to be the capital of the empire. The conquerors of the conquerors of the world, rushed in from various provinces in Germany, which had never been subdued by the Romans; as well as from those vast countries which I have already mentioned, in the north of Europe, and north-west of Asia, and which are now occupied by the Danes, the Swedes, the Poles, the subjects of the Russian empire, and the Tartars*.

In the last days of Pope Eugenius the Fourth, two of his servants, the learned Poggius and a friend, ascended the Capitoline Hill, reposed themselves among the ruins of columns and temples, and viewed from that commanding spot, the wide and various prospect of desolation. The place, and the object, gave ample scope for moralizing on the vicissitudes of fortune, which spares neither man, nor the proudest of his works, which buries empires and cities in a common grave. "The spectacle of

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the

• Robertson.

“ the world, how is it fallen, how changed,
“ how defaced ! Cast your eyes on the Palatine
“ Hill, and seek among the shapeless and enor-
“ mous fragments, the marble theatre, the
“ obelisks, the colossal statues, the porticos of
“ Nero’s palace. The vacant space, is only
“ interrupted by gardens and ruins. The pub-
“ lic and private edifices, that were founded for
“ eternity, lie prostrate, naked, and broken,
“ like the limbs of a mighty giant ; and the
“ ruin is the more visible, from the stupendous
“ relics that have survived the injuries of time
“ and fortune.”

LET-

LETTER LXXXVII.

THE calm succeeds the storm. For many years before, and for many years subsequent to the birth of Augustus Cæsar, the turbulency of faction caused the blood of the whole Roman world to flow, in an unremitting stream. No corner of the globe, was free from massacre. Murder stalked abroad, and dealt her blows in the face of day. Nor did Augustus's accession to power, at first, put a stop to the calamity. On the contrary, even friends became proscribed with foes, and one common grave received them both. Towards the close of his reign, indeed, the enormities of Octavius, were certainly forgotten in the public blessings that were derived from Augustus. And hence, one would wish, if it were possible, to separate the one character from the other. To Augustus succeeded a disgraceful line. The game of human desolation was continued,—and of all

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period,

periods in the calamitous history of man, perhaps this was the most dreadful. How wretchedly then do we impose upon ourselves ! How unaccountably are we taught to cherish a sort of hallowed veneration for an æra, which seems with little more, than what the best minds must hold in abhorrence ; which scarcely shews any thing but what shocking excesses might possibly be produced from the greatest vice, supported by the greatest authority. Observe even the liberal minded, the heroic Julius Cæsar ; with how much indifference does he relate, that he put to death the whole senate of the Veneri, who had yielded to his mercy ; that he laboured to extirpate the whole nation of the Eburones ; and that forty thousand persons were massacred at Bourges, by the just revenge of his soldiers, who spared neither sex nor age ! *

Candour would wish to throw a veil over the failings of an illustrious character ; but deliberately perpetrated crimes have no claim to palliation. In those days of tempest, however, when the Romans "trode down and devoured the kingdoms from their mighty strength," † a dawn of peace beamed from an obscure and neglected

* Gibbon.

† Daniel.

lefted corner of the east, which, mild and gentle indeed, in its commencement, was soon to enlarge its circle, and after the struggle of a few ages, ultimately to embrace the most considerable, and the most enlightened portion of the human race. But, let us for a moment cast our eyes on the religious state of the empire of Rome, at or rather just before this period.

The national character of the Jews, who bordered upon the African provinces of Rome, was deeply tinged with superstition. Delighted with the ceremonial prescriptions of the law, and fond of such rites as please the imagination, they are represented, as undervaluing those moral propensities which improve the heart. This unhappy bias was greatly increased by the doctrine of the Pharisees, which reduced the prejudices of their countrymen into a regular system of superstition. By vain traditions, they added to the load of pageantry. By a vague interpretation of the law, they loosened the social tie. Nor were the good purposes of community, and of religion, less undermined by the Sadducees, who free in their enquiries, were no less bold and impious in their attack. Men, with such dispositions, were necessarily intolerant. They even had it in command from God,

as they believed, to root out idolatry from the land which was given as an inheritance, to his chosen people.

Of the Greeks, and the Romans themselves, who delighted in stately temples, expensive sacrifices, pompous ceremonies, magnificent festivals, with all the other circumstances and shew of splendor; I fear, little more is to be said, than that if they did at all, they did but negatively possess the two essentials of all true doctrine, a repentance of past crimes, and an earnest desire of future amendment. To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God, are acceptable services, which made no part in the general system of heathen religion. Pagan principles were plants of a rank soil, in which every vice, that power nourishes in the great, or oppression engenders in the mean, thrived, and grew up with vigour.

We are much abused, when we are told, that the ancients were tolerant, and kindly admitted every species of intercommunity in worship. What their mythology was in fact, we have seen. What it was in practice, is of a very different complexion. I will not tease you with quotations; although you may believe me, when

I assure you, that I could readily furnish you with a volume, and all closing with the dismal sounds of intolerance and persecution. One motive of Alexander the Great, for instance, when in a drunken frolic he rushed from the banquet, to set fire to the palace of Persepolis, was to retaliate the sacrilegious injuries committed by the Persians in Greece, of which he was appointed generalissimo. Cambyses, a predecessor of Xerxes, had made cruel war also on the ancient and magnificent monuments dedicated to the national religion of Egypt. Strabo visited the awful and stupendous ruins. They even still remain, to fill the traveller with astonishment and grief. *

The doctrine of the Syrian theology, was to admit no gods but their own. Antiochus Epiphanes, after his conquest of Palestine, prohibited the adoration of foreign deities.† This gave occasion to the war, in which Judas Maccabæus and his brothers, signalized themselves so greatly, against what they denominated the bloody tyrant. The Egyptians fought incessantly among themselves for the superior excellence of their divinities. Their mutual antipathy,

* Savary.

† Josephus.

thy, has been well described by the Poet.* Where, says Timocles, are the Egyptians, who do not punish those, who behave impiously towards the gods? The baser the materials of the Divinity however, the greater was the devotion which was paid him.

Stilpo, was banished Athens, by the high court of Areopagus, for blasphemously affirming the statue of Minerva, in the citadel, to be no divinity, but the workmanship of Phidias.† For the Numen of the deity, was supposed to enter, and reside in the holy fabrication for ever, after the dedication had been made. And hence the imaginary animation of all the gods, and the universal eagerness, to have a seat near the images of some divinity. Protagoras the sophist, was expelled his country, for a doubt insinuated in one of his writings, in these words, "whether there be gods or not, I have nothing to offer."‡ Prodicus, the master of Socrates, was put to death, for having taught in his school, doctrines heterodox to the established way of thinking. Alcibiades and Æschylus were nearly destroyed by religious bigotry and rage. Socrates suffered, and Plato cautiously dissembled his opi-

* Juvenal.

† Diog. Laert.

‡ Cicero.

opinion on the subject of Divinity, lest he should fall under the lash of the Areopagites. Aristotle was forced to fly his country.

The Egyptian superstition, indeed, found its way into Rome; but, was there always looked upon with abhorrence. The temples of Isis and Serapis were frequently demolished. Many lives were sacrificed to root it out. Fortunately, however, every thing was not destroyed at the same time, with the unhappy priests, altars and idols. You recollect the temples at Puzzoli and Pompeia. The former of which, if entirely laid open, would be magnificent. About a century after the conquest of Britain, the emperor Claudius also ordered the total abolition of the Druidical religion.* Tiberius, sometime before him, had put it under severe restraint, and had actually forbidden any Roman to be instructed in its rites. He had gone so far as to persecute it with as pious fanaticism, as the zealous Julian afterwards did Christianity.

On this subject, however, I am afraid I may occasion obscurity by anticipation. And, therefore, it may be better to proceed in a more regular method.

It

* Suetonius,

It is a melancholy truth to begin with, but undoubted it is, that the finest talents have often conceived it more glorious to attack Christianity, than to push their hostilities into any other quarter. It is not at any time assailed, you will perceive, like any common foe ; and why ? simply, because it has been long in possession of the field, and is aged and respectable. Its influence has extended far ; it has made its way even among barbarous nations ; it has incorporated itself with the first principles of public and domestic happiness ; its authority has been submitted to by tyrants ; it has been revered by the wise, embraced by the virtuous, and supported by the learned. Here to root up and destroy, is not a conquest over an individual, a province, or a nation ; it is over the greatest part of the generations and kingdoms of the earth ; over laws and establishments ; over sense and science ; over reason and man. A triumph, how worthy of ambition !

That men, whose understandings have been enlightened by all the aids of human ability ; who are compelled by the utmost exertion of their reason, to admit as an irrefragable truth, what perplexes the first principles of all reasoning, the eternal existence of an uncaused being ;

being ; who know that they cannot give a full account of any one phenomenon in nature, from the rotation of the great orbs of the universe, to the germination of a blade of grass, without having recourse to him, as the primary incomprehensible cause ; and who, from seeing him every where, have, by a strange fatality (converting an excess of evidence into a principle of disbelief) at times doubted, concerning his existence any where, and made the very universe their god ;* that men such as these, should have ventured to deny possibilities, though not demonstratively established, is an extravagance not easily understood.

It is scarcely to be believed, that so pure a religion, as Christianity, should have ever met with opposition. Every tongue, it might modestly and fondly have been presumed, would be charmed into silence, and every pen suspended from abusing a system, so wise in its direction, so powerful in its influence, and so manifestly conducive to human felicity ! which makes life more charming, and death less terrible ! one would imagine it altogether incredible, a religion so harmless, so orderly, and so beneficial.

* Bishop Watson.

ficial should find any enemies. But, there are those, who would have us live independent of its precepts; who would have us acknowledge none of its energies; and who would have us die, without any consolation from its promises."*

I will allow you, that many upright men, have leaned to more than particular scepticism; and that their misfortune in so doing, is no more to be found fault with, than the distorted lot of him, who has unhappily been born lame, incapable of hearing, or blind. Illiberality towards such characters is unworthy. A free-thinker, is not necessarily, a traitor, a thief, a robber, an assassin. Nor is free-thinking, as has been represented, a powerful and indiscriminate corrosive, which begins by attacking prejudices, but ends in the destruction of pure and simple truth. It is misanthropic and miserably gloomy, to deal in that species of rant, which superstition employs to inflame the languid bigotry of fanaticism. There have been some, as morally honest free-thinkers, perhaps, as morally honest theologians. Both, one and the other, indeed, have erred. Thinking men, are often misled. It cannot be supposed, they would wish

* Private worth, basis of public decency.

wish to enlighten mankind, and at the same time endeavour to be the destroyers of society. Who, but a reprobate or a madman, is mischievous for mischief's sake?

However comfortlessly speculative in remote and mysterious questions, a few of the chosen band of free-thinking philosophers have, it must be confessed, been of some use to their fellow-creatures, by shewing them, on some occasions, why they should employ their reason, and by diffusing the sacred principles of freedom and the blessings of toleration. Those shocks which disperse the clouds of ignorance are at all times of utility; and candid enquirers, may be well compared to colonies from polished countries, reforming the institutions of ruder tribes. Yet, it is not to be denied, that though even an Atheist may be a good man, atheism itself must be a pestiferous monster.

A* latent, and even involuntary scepticism, certainly adheres to some characters. And therefore, it is as illiberal in the advocates of religion, to attribute the scepticism of every Deist to perverse infidelity; as it is in the Deists, to refer the faith of every Christian to

professional bias.* This particular bent we can neither comprehend, nor estimate. The avowal, however, of sentiments, hostile to the venerated religion and political constitution of one's country; and the attempt to excite commotion in the breasts of the multitude, where it cannot be expected to lie inactive, quietly awaiting the event of literary discussion; are more, perhaps, than a conscientiously disposed man would feel himself perfectly justified in, from the right of private judgment.

Doubt is, unquestionably, a powerful key to knowledge. He, who never doubts, never examines. He who never examines, discovers nothing. He, who discovers nothing, is blind, or at least relatively in the dark, and will remain so. But, what species of doubt is that which teaches me, that the gospel is not to be depended upon; that the best moral system in the world has no authority; that the brightest examples, are shadows; that I am not accountable to God for my conduct, have no necessity of pardon for my sins, nor prospect of reward for my virtues; that Providence is a dream, and heaven a fable? If there be, indeed, reason to doubt concerning these

* Bishop Watson.

these things, doubt quietly ; but, take care not to disturb the minds of other men. No man has a right of speaking, any more than of acting, according to the full freedom of his thoughts. The freedom belongs to him as a rational creature ; he lies under the restraint, as a member of society.

The fashion of incredulity among the Romans, says Gibbon, was communicated from the philosopher to the man of pleasure or business, from the noble to the plebeian, and from the master to the menial slave. On public occasions, the philosophical part of mankind, affected to treat with respect and decency the religious institutions of their country ; but their secret contempt penetrated through the thin and awkward disguise ; and even the people, when they discovered that their deities were rejected and derided by those, whose rank and understanding they had been accustomed to reverence, were filled with doubts and apprehensions, concerning the truth of those doctrines, to which they had before yielded the most implicit belief. The decline of ancient prejudice, left a very numerous portion of human kind in a painful and comfortless situation. A state of scepticism and suspense may amuse a few inquisitive minds ;

but, the practice of superstition is so congenial to the multitude, that if they are forcibly awakened, they still regret the loss of their pleasing vision.*

Polybius, long before Gibbon, considered this matter, in the same point of view, and expressed it even in more forcible language. "The present age," says he, "contrary to the practise of their ancestors, manifest much indiscretion, if not an absolute want of good sense, in endeavouring to efface religious ideas from the people; in encouraging mankind to despise the sacred institutions of their country; and in wresting, from headstrong licentiousness, the only curb capable of checking depravity."† Now if such was the case during the ages of mythological extravagancy, what are we, (even liberality and charity leading the way) to say to the oppugners of inoffensive Christianity? Is he only the philosopher, who is wise enough to despise the religion of his country; and virtuous enough, to endeavour, by making converts to his opinion, to ensnare the happiness and morality of his fellow creatures, by depriving

* Rom. Hist.

† Lib. 6.

priving vice of its most formidable enemy, and misery of its only consolation?

Profaneness of sentiment is no proof of firmness of mind; nor is wantonness of expression, a mark of elegance of manners. What pain must be excited in virtuous and pious minds, when they find those pages, which profess to instruct and delight, sullied by repeated sentences, and descriptions, which cannot but call forth a sigh from the bosom of religion, and raise a blush on the cheek of modesty and candour! * Can free-thinkers be so vain as seriously to believe, that, themselves, and a few of their confraternity excepted, all the rest of the Christian world have been, still are, and evermore must continue ignorant, absurd, superstitious, and contemptuously enthusiastic; that, the most learned men, have been mad, and all the most amiably resigned, dastardly dabblers in illusion?

The scoffer at religion, is something like the destroyer of Diana's sanctuary. His disrespect to scripture springs from an aim at singularity, a desire of becoming conspicuous. He boldly, no matter how sacrilegiously, resolves like Eros-

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tratus,

* Exam. of Gibbon.

tratus, to set fire to the sacred temple, and to be talked of! I thought, I beheld a fly, says an instructive writer,* upon one of the pillars of St. Paul's, and it straight came into my head, that this same fly, was a free-thinker. For it required some comprehension in the eye of the spectator, to take in at one view, the various parts of the building, in order to observe their symmetry and design. But, to the fly, whose prospect was confined to a little part of one of the stones of a little pillar, the joint beauty of the whole, or the distinct use of its parts, were invisible, and nothing could appear but small inequalities in the surface of the hewn stone, which in the view of the insect, seemed so many deformed rocks and precipices. The thoughts of a free-thinker are employed on certain minute particularities of religion, the difficulty of a single text, or the unaccountableness of some step of Providence, or point of doctrine, to his narrow faculties, without comprehending the scope and design of Christianity; the perfection to which it raises human nature; the light it has shed abroad upon the world; and the close connexion it has, as well with the good of public societies, as with that of individuals.

This

* Guardian, 70.

This is not like the true philosopher, who examines thoroughly before he believes, and thinks before he acts; and who consequently, when he is determined, cannot fail of having integrity in his principle, and candour in his conduct. The true philosopher does not seek alone for absurdity, or the appearance of it, in scripture; now laying hold of the letter of the text; and now of a forced interpretation. No arbitrary construction passes in his mind for knowledge. He does not admit those circumstances to establish decision, which fairly considered ought only to create doubt; nor, on the contrary, every glittering apparition, that is pointed out in the vast wild of imagination, to pass for an absolute reality.

It is the unassuming and resigned temper, which examines in such a manner as to shew, that while it refuses submission to the authority of man, as if it were that of God; it is careful not to reject the authority of God, as if it were only that of man.* And this temper, undoubtedly, I do not hesitate to own, does much more service to Christianity, than that which resolves all into authority, and builds its religion

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on

* Bolingbroke.

on its faith, instead of building its faith on its religion. To believe that Jesus was the Messiah, is said indeed by some, to be the essence of faith; but, to observe the laws of morality, I must always believe to be the essence of duty.

I should be sorry to cry up faith in opposition to reason. For experience shews us, that men, who have held that they were not to consult reason in the affairs of religion, however, apparently contradicting common sense, and the very principles of all their knowledge, by indulging their natural propensity to superstition, have been led into such strange ideas, and extravagant practices, that considerate men have been lost in amazement at their folly. *Credo, quia impossibile est*,—is surely a mad sally of zeal.* No, on such an occasion, rather exert your faculties, to the utmost; and claim your right, with the noble boldness and independence of a man. Prefer being, as a mere individual in a free state, even to reigning over a multitude of slaves.

It is comfortable to a good man, to say to himself, I am born in the bosom of Christianity,
and

* Locke.

and I submit willingly to its decisions. My latest breath I mean to draw in the religion of my fathers, and to believe as much as it is possible for man to believe, who has neither had a communication with the Divinity, nor been witness to the performance of a miracle. It is not every man, I know, who can nicely separate the corruptions of religion from religion itself, nor justly apportion the degrees of credit due to the diversities of evidence. But, I am not from this, rashly to conclude, that all revealed religion is a cheat, and that it is supported by no better testimony, and is no more worthy of attention, than the prodigies of Pagan story, or the tricking wonders of shameless imposition.

Thoughtless man catches infidelity, like the hues of the Cameleon, from the proximity of every passing object. Simulation, and dissimulation, and all the nice shades and delicate gradations of passive and active deceit, have injured him in the tenderest points. They have relaxed the general nerve of virtue, and have given a fatal taint to his soundest morals. For, though the evil propensities of nature, and the bewitching allurements of pleasure, will too often seduce even men of the best dispositions, into devious paths, yet we shall find that few will be incurably

bly wicked, without the internal corruption of principle, which knows how to justify iniquity, and confirm evil conduct, by the sanction of corrupt reasoning.*

Why then, ye men of talents, why will ye prostitute your abilities? Why exert such fervency of zeal in the promotion of scepticism in theory, and of immorality in practice? Are you well assured, you study your own interest, your own reputation, and what must be almost of equal concern to you, the welfare of your fellow creatures, when you rear the standard of incredulity, and shake the wholesome bonds of society and religion? Uncertainty, is a bitter companion of the heavy and painful hours of life. How deeply then is it to be regretted, that the rich presents, with which you have been gifted by the God of nature, should be squandered in the decoration of the paths of misery! Surely you would not designedly labor for opprobrium; nor spend your days, in laying up posthumous disgrace! Yet, let me ask you, what besides has been the fate of the culpable preachers of infidelity, your predecessors, who as meteors have cast a momentary but mischievous gleam, and then have disappeared?

Persons

* Religion of the fashionable world.

Persons, eminent in ability, are seated to great advantage; and when supported by piety and virtue, a lustre is thrown even upon their ordinary language. But, this is not the case, with writers of a contrary tendency. The true honor of man, is placed, not in what merely commands external respect, but what commands the respect of the heart; what raises one to acknowledged eminence above others of the same species: what always creates esteem, and in its highest degree, produces veneration. There is a wide distinction between fame and true honour. The former is a loud and noisy applause: the latter, a more silent and internal homage. Fame floats on the breath of the multitude: honour rests on the judgment of the thinking. Fame may give praise, while it withholds esteem: true honour implies esteem mingled with respect. The one regards particular distinguished talents; the other looks up to the whole character. Hence, a man may be famous, and yet not honoured. We may envy his abilities; we may wish to rival them; but, we should not on any account chuse to be classed with him who possesses them.*

Men

* Dr. Blair.

Men do not unfrequently take pride, in what should be their shame. It is related by Quintus Curtius, that the Persians always conceived a lasting and invincible contempt of a man, who had violated the laws of secrecy; for they thought that, however he might be deficient in the qualities requisite to actual excellence, the negative virtues at least, were always in his power; and though he might not be able to speak well, it was still easy for him not to speak at all. Might not this convey a hint of wholesome import, to many of the heedless characters of the present hour, who frail and unsound in the extreme, are still most injurious from the unfortunate bias of their ideas, as well as from their incapacity of retention?

What must we conclude concerning those people who are so inflated with vanity, as to think their very errors respectable, and that the merit of their abilities as writers, is more than sufficient to atone, for their want of propriety as philosophers? But, their frankness, they would have you believe, is a pledge of their sincerity; and a proof of the superiority of their cause. That they are in their own estimation, as infallible as the Pope, though they are certainly less charitable, is what I will readily acknowledge, for they fulminate

minate censures against all, who had not conformed to their decisions, even before they had been promulgated. With a sovereign contempt for the opinions of others, it is very evident, they have no diffidence respecting their own. As if perched upon some superior eminence, or moving in an higher orb, surrounded with a purer light, and taking in a more enlarged prospect, they look down, not with pity, but with disdain, on the whole body of mankind, as on slaves of dulness and ignorance, who drudge in feculence, or who rove at large in the paths of folly and madness.

They are, however, fatalists, and they act from necessity. If so, indeed, and it has been ordained that they should utter their injurious systems; it must be likewise admitted, their recompense has likewise been ordained. "You should not chastise me," said the servant to the Stoic; and consequently fatalist, Zeno, "it was destined I should steal:" "Yes, and it was destined likewise, you should be scourged," replied his master. Men of classical ambition; should then consider, that the wisest and best men in all ages of the world, have been those who have lived up to the religion of their country, when they saw nothing in it opposite to morality

rality, and to the best lights they had of the di-
 vine nature. Pythagoras's first rule directed
 his disciples to worship the gods, as it is or-
 dained by law. Socrates, in his last moments,
 desires his friends to offer a cock to Æsculapius;
 and evidently out of deference to the established
 worship of his country. Aristotle, to clear his
 reputation of intentionally acting contrary to the
 rules prescribed for one of the initiated, ordered
 by will, a sacrifice to Ceres. Xenophon, tells
 us, his prince, whom he would set forth as a
 pattern of perfection, when he found his death ap-
 proaching, offered sacrifices on the mountains to
 the Persian Jupiter and the Sun, according to
 the customs of the Persians. Nay, even the
 Epicureans, and atomical philosophers, shewed
 a consideration in this particular; for though the
 being of a God was entirely repugnant to their
 schemes of natural philosophy, they contented
 themselves with the denial of a Providence: as-
 serting, at the same time, the existence of gods
 in general; because, they would not shock the
 common belief of mankind, and the religion of
 their country.

A wise man, is on all occasions unassuming;
 and his deportment, when contrasted with that
 of the ignorant and vain, has been well compared
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to the varied appearance of a sprig of corn, which while the ear is empty, holds up its head proudly, but, as soon as it is filled with grain, bends modestly down, and would withdraw itself from observation, were it not for its utility to mankind. Do modern free-thinkers exhibit a portrait so fair? Or do they not rather shine as the tawdry jay in borrowed feathers? They are, I am afraid it will be found, but common echoes, and even in their greatest strength, fight with alien weapons.

In the earliest ages of Christianity, various Pagan writers of ability declaimed against the religion and the sect of Christ. They exerted their best faculties against the establishment of doctrines, which struck at the excesses of man: and by reason and argument endeavoured to annihilate, what was doomed to overcome the most desperate opposition. Celsus, the Epicurean; and the Platonists, Porphyry, Jamblicus, and Proclus, were of the number. Whatever was subtle, whatever was alluring, whatever was seductive, was brilliantly displayed by these controversialists. Nothing in short, could have withstood their attacks, but the unshakeable solidity of truth. Celsus, published his animated work
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in the second century. The others followed him.

From these writers, who by the way, you will recollect, took up the pen to prevent innovation in the subsisting religion of their country, the modern latitudinarian phalanx have borrowed their vivacity, their sneers, and their animadversions. The bad, and not the good principle, however, has attracted their attention. They would be as eager in opposition, though they certainly are not so laudable in the cause from which their enmity springs. Nor should I call these alone borrowers from Celsus and Porphyry; they are in truth the youngest and the last in the long race of borrowers, who have often, changed their principle, but, never varied their object; who have continually altered in form, but never in substance; who have in a word, perpetuated from one age to another, that pernicious vanity, which sapping tranquillity and hope, has invariably terminated in disappointed expectation.

If the productions of literature be estimated by their utility, the most elevated place among writers ought no doubt to be assigned to the historian. The severity of truth indeed, marks
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out for him a more regular line of conduct than the poet, or the orator, is required to pursue; yet his obligation to follow her immediate dictates is made easy, and even delightful, by proper reflections on the dignity of his labours, and the animating anticipation of the reward which must succeed them. It is his peculiar and important province, to investigate the latent principles of conduct, and pursue them to their remotest consequences; to delineate the diversified picture of actions and characters, and display the revolutions of government, and the fate of empires. If his subject be judiciously chosen, and his productions be stamped with the marks of genius and fidelity, successive generations will celebrate his name as the benefactor of mankind, for giving them an imaginary existence in past ages, for introducing them to the knowledge of departed excellence, and for enabling them to profit by the conduct of their predecessors. His praise, will be the constant theme of their gratitude, whilst they shun the vices, and imitate the virtues, which his works have consigned to immortality.*

Good books are, thus the legacies, that a great genius leaves to mankind. Most other arts that aim at perpetuity, continue but a short time. Statues, can last but a few years; edifices, fewer; and columns still fewer than edifices. The arts, are expressed in mouldering materials. But, books, can be multiplied to what number we please, and still the copy be as valuable as the original. As writings, are thus durable therefore, and may pass from age to age, how careful should an author be of committing any thing to the world, that may corrupt posterity, or poison the minds of men with impiety and error.

In the character of the father of history,* we always see a prominent philanthropy; he without disguise delights in the success of the good, and grieves at their misfortunes. But, there is also another trait in his character, which I for one, says Lord Monboddo, admire much. He is a religious historian, showing his firm belief, not only that there is a God, but that his providence directs the events of human life, as well as the operations of nature. He who has not this knowledge of divine and human things, continues his lordship, cannot write well of the affairs of men; nor

* Herodotus.

Nor can he promote that prime virtue, *piety*, without which no other virtue can be perfect, nor can there be any real happiness among men. To recommend this virtue, I hold to be the duty of the historian; and therefore, I intirely disapprove of such writers as Tacitus and his modern imitators, who, either say nothing at all of Providence, or, what is worse, profess to believe that human affairs are governed either by blind chance, or fatal necessity.*

Approbation, it must be allowed on all hands, is to be with-held, in proportion as an author is discovered to disseminate injurious, sceptical, and irreligious notions. Any endeavour to loosen the ties of religious duty, is an affront to the pious principles of education; implanted in every cultivated mind; and an act of hostility, against the general interests of society. If it has always been essential to historical decorum, for a writer to support the character of the friend to virtue and morality, how flagrant a violation of it, must the attempt of any one be, who undermines the credibility of that revelation, which is their best and firmest support!

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Moreover,

* Origin and Progress of Language.

Moreover, let us for a moment imagine, the Divine origin of Christianity, and its infinite importance with respect to the dearest interests of mankind, to be out of the question, and let us place it on a level only with other the most indifferent subjects. If in the discussion of the principles of science, in the developement of the intellectual powers, in commenting on the maxims of legislation, or the rules of ethics, — if in examining the characters of Newton, of Locke, of Montesquieu, or of Bacon, a writer should indulge the sallies of humour so far, as to scoff at what he could not confute, cavil at what he must know to be true, and ridicule those whom he ought to reverence; would he not provoke the indignation of the judicious, and incur the censure of the dispassionate? Would they not determine that he had mistaken irony for argument, that his judgment was a slave to the petulance of his wit, and that his conduct was an insult to propriety, candor, and truth? *

It is not, I acknowledge, in the least surprising, that bitterness should now and then escape the enquirer into the progress of Christianity; for

* Kett.

for to see the most benign religion imagination can form, becoming an instrument of oppression; and the most humble one, administering to the pride, the avarice, and the ambition of those, who have wished to be considered as its guardians, and have avowed themselves its professors, would extort a censure even from men the most zealously attached to clerical authority. But, it is neither very candid, nor a very useful undertaking, to be solely and industriously engaged in portraying the characters of the professors of Christianity, universally in the worst colours. It is not candid, because the great law of impartiality, which obliges an historian to reveal the imperfections of the uninspired teachers and believers of the gospel, obliges him also not to conceal, or to pass over with niggard and reluctant mention, the illustrious virtues of those, who gave up fortune and fame, all their comforts, and all their hopes in this life, nay life itself, rather than violate any one of the precepts of that gospel, which from the testimony of inspired teachers, they conceived they had good reason to believe. It is not useful, because to a careless observer (that is to the generality of mankind) their faults, may seem to cast a shade on the faith which they professed; and may really in-

fect the minds of the young and unlearned especially, with prejudices against a religion, upon their rational reception or rejection of which, a matter of the utmost importance may (believe me it may, for ought you or any person else can prove to the contrary) entirely depend.*

It is easy to amuse a giddy world, with the immoralities of priests, and the ambition of prelates: with the absurd virulence of synods and councils; with the ridiculous doctrines, which visionary enthusiasts or interested churchmen, have sanctified with the name of Christian: but, a display of ingenuity or erudition upon such subjects, unless carefully managed, is oftentimes misplaced; since it excites almost in every person, an unavoidable suspicion of the purity of the source, whence such polluted streams could have been derived. Great attention, therefore, should always be paid, not to represent the vices, or the indiscretions of the individual, as originating in the principles of his religion. The wretched calendars of bigotry, every one is acquainted with. But, the mild tenets of Christianity, are surely neither contemptible, nor injurious. Even the text of Moses (and it
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is that which in a peculiar manner, nourishes paltry wit) if it were not itself possessed of merit, would certainly be entitled to respect, as being, even suppose erroneously, looked upon as the foundation of the best system, that ever was given to man.

Of all the revolutions, which have taken place upon the great theatre of the world, there is no one so calculated to attract the attention of the learned, to rouse the curiosity of the inquisitive, or to excite the gratitude of the pious, as that which has been effected by the establishment of Christianity. The page of history, displays to us various instances, in which conquered nations have been compelled to acknowledge the authority of one mighty sovereign, and to yield a reluctant and temporary submission to the terror of his arms. It also presents us with examples of philosophers, who have disseminated discoveries of science, and taught systems of ethics, within the narrow circle of their disciples. But, to simplify the leading principles of social and religious obligation, to harmonize them into one comprehensive plan, to accommodate them to the capacity of every individual, and to propagate them by the gentle

arts of persuasion, has never been the project of any legislator, nor of any philosopher. *

The religion of Christ has then, I may say, exercised by far a nobler empire, than that of arms. It has civilized those whom it has conquered, and given law to the human mind. Yet, this is the system which is traduced. This is the code that merits the philosopher's animadversion and reproof. It is to be lamented, but it is certainly true, that learning, like travelling, and all other methods of improvement, though it finishes good sense, makes an ill-regulated genius, ten thousand times more insufferable, by supplying variety of matter to presumption, and by affording opportunities for extravagance. Such glittering pretenders, however, have not been without their use. Their spots are always visible; and in dispelling what they have called mists, they have unintentionally at all times been the cause of raising mists themselves. Now for this, we have obligations to them; for they have set us in the way of discovering their fallacies, and of steering clear at least of the absurdity of their deductions.

Moralists

Moralists observe, that just remarks on the pernicious tendency of vicious indulgence, may contribute materially to the regulations of good manners. Pursuing a similar train of reasoning, I would maintain, that no small degree of intellectual improvement may be derived from contemplating the progress of sophistry and error. For if we discover the occasions on which great and enlightened minds have deviated from the paths of right reason, our understandings will be gradually weaned from that implicit homage, which we too fondly pay to a favourite name, and we shall become more scrupulous and circumspect in the admission of opinions, which are not founded on the basis of truth. Comprehensive knowledge, and splendid talents, afford, I am sorry to say it, no constant security, against the delusions of fancy, or the wiles of imposture.

The example, as well as the precepts of free-thinkers plunge the heedless into the most fatal excesses. Even those who are disposed in some degree to reflection, have their best propensities gradually undermined; and what they at first embraced, from want of due consideration, they are soon found to persevere in, from professional vanity. Have you not observed, that men of a certain fashion, and women of a certain
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ton, are dreadfully afraid, lest by appearing to have religion, they should appear to be deficient in spirit, or to be particularly unamiable in manner? What is there then that is required for converts, more than the dexterous management of sarcasm, or the no less happy address of irony? With bon mots, with asserting boldly, and reasoning slightly, the slenderest even in ability in these giddy circles, is generally as sure to find credit and reputation, as though he were gifted with the profoundest knowledge, and the most brilliant talents.

Poor feather! yet has it never occurred to him, how many characters of the deepest science; how many characters of the most intrepid courage, and of the sweetest affability and kindest demeanor, there have been, who have not only practised, but have openly gloried in cherishing the sublime principles of Christianity? From the proper pride which every good man must feel in the consciousness of his own character, from what a man owes to himself; let me then ask, if it would be preferable to be rather classed with the crowds, who sacrifice to mistaken vanity, than with the immortal band, who have irradiated
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their fellow creatures, and who by universal consent have been acknowledged the first and the wisest of their species?

It may be said, many men are extremely well disposed, but they are ashamed. What,—shall a man, who would fly to serve his country, blush to serve his God? Believe me, though the charge be heavy, libertinism, misanthropy, pride, an arrogating self conceit, and nothing else, are the main springs of infidelity: the voluptuary becomes a free thinker; the misanthropist, an Atheist; and the man of real abilities, the vicious vender of paradox and singularity. A prostitution of the female person, even though occasioned by want, is in all civilized countries, and according to the laws of all societies, condemned. But is not such an unfortunate aggression, comparatively guiltless, when considered with the prostitution, which sacrifices at the shrine of infidelity, the effects of learning, the gifts of genius, and even the character and very attributes of virtue?

Such a writer, we are told, though free in his opinions, is nevertheless an honest man. I do not doubt it. But, though he be morality, or perfection

section itself, is it possible for me to say he does no harm, by the pernicious tendency of his writings? Are not his productions read; does he not compose in captivating language; is not his learning universally admired; and does he not to the utmost of his ability, legitimate, and sanction by argument, what the wisdom and government of his country, have declared to be injurious? Many read such books as his, to kill the ennui of the moment. Youth like to be deemed philosophers; and it is easy to be so, when the principles are so fascinatingly laid down. The very name of a celebrated author, gives currency to error. Novelty, readily seizes the mind, and multiplied editions give stability, if I may say so, to delusion. Of all postulates, therefore, this to me, is the most clear; that that the private Atheist is an inconstant man, and an enemy to himself; but that the public Atheist, is a destroyer of the peace of that society, he ought to cherish. Nil interest favetas sceleris, an illud facias.* To favour wickedness and to commit it, is the same thing.

Arcesilaus the Platonician, says Numericus, denied and affirmed the same thing. He threw himself

* Seneca.

himself blindly to the right and to the left. He gloried in his ignorance of the difference between good and evil. The first phantasy that came into his head, he gave to the world with hardiness. The next moment, he contradicted it with reasons still more forcible. He was in short a Hydra, who lacerated and destroyed himself.* To whom does this apply? To no philosophy of modern days, I will confess, and to no country exclusively. Each has had its Arcesilauts. Jean Jacques, says Voltaire, is not capable of reasoning. He never in his life, made a good syllogism. Voltaire, says Jean Jacques, is unequal to a fair chain of argument. He never got to the depth, d'une demi-ligne.

It is a melancholy reflection, that the wealthy taken literally or figuratively, are more careless about religious duties, than the indigent, and that poverty and piety are so often linked together. It would appear, that hope is a more powerful sentiment in the human breast than gratitude, since those who ought to feel the greatest thankfulness to Heaven, display the least. There are some, it may be said to an affluent man

* Numer apud Euseb.

man, who salute the first dawnings of miserable destiny, under all the horrors of the grossest vassalage, while you are free-born, nursed in the bosom of refinement, dandled in the lap of prosperity, and charmed from the moment you open your eyes on the world, by the richest prospects, its honours, its pleasures, or its profits can disclose or command. Others depressed by a feeble intellect or imperfect organs, carry nothing but maladies and deformities about them, from the cradle to the grave. Should not this stamp a value upon those comely proportions which distinguish you, from the crooked and diseased? Does it not endear the giver of them in your esteem? A present of the least article in dress, that might suit your taste, would excite your gratitude. And is nothing due to him for health so perfect, and a form so fair? Why are you endowed with a genius capable of grasping all science, a sound judgment, a faithful memory, a rich imagination, and all the choiest faculties of a liberal and polished mind? Do not multitudes come into the world with bodies as handsome, and parts as promising, who are, notwithstanding, abandoned to want and obscurity; whose understandings, enveloped in ignorance and error, are absolutely precluded from whatever leads to duty or to happiness?

What

What numbers of rational creatures have no distinctions from others, but misfortunes; nothing of their own but afflictions; no patrimony, but misery! This banishes from their minds, every gleam of comfort; they feed upon bitterness; and their evenings and their mornings, are drenched in tears. And do not at the same time not only men and beasts, but all the elements of things, under the auspices of indulgent Heaven, minister to your convenience, swell your enjoyments, and heighten your felicity? Look at the foot of the great wheel of life, as it runs its awful and mysterious round! What shoals of helpless creatures are daily ground by oppression, mangled by adversity, bowed down with sorrow or overwhelmed by despair; while you enjoy yourself, and repose at ease on the top, as on a couch of roses, and ride triumphant on the high places of the earth, respected by equals, adored by inferiors, feared by enemies, and caressed by friends.*

Suppose the mighty work accomplished, says a most liberal divine,† in addressing himself to to disingenuous and irreverent men,—suppose the cross trampled upon, Christianity every where

* Private worth, basis of public decency.

† Bishop Watson.

where proscribed, and the religion of nature, once more become the religion of Europe; what advantage will you have derived to your country, or to yourselves from the exchange? I know your answer, you will have freed the world from the hypocrisy of priests, and the tyranny of superstition.—No; you forget that Lycurgus, and Numa, and Odia, and Mango-Capac, and all the great legislators of ancient and modern story, have been of opinion, that the affairs of civil society, could not well be conducted, without some religion; you must of necessity introduce a priesthood, with probably as much hypocrisy; a religion, with assuredly more superstition, than that which you now reprobate with such indecent and ill-grounded contempt. But, I will tell you, from what you will have freed the world; you will have freed it from its abhorrence of vice, and from every powerful incentive to virtue; you will, with the religion, have brought back the depressed morality of Paganism; you will have robbed mankind of their firm assurance of another life; and thereby, you will have despoiled them of their patience, of their humility, of their charity, of their chastity, of all those ~~virtues~~ ~~and~~ ~~virtues~~ virtues, which, however despicable they may appear in your eyes, are the only ones which meliorate and sublime our nature; which Paganism

has never knew, which spring from Christianity alone, which do, or might constitute our comfort in this life, and without the possession of which, another life, if after all there should happen to be one, must, (unless a miracle be exerted in the alteration of our disposition,) be more miserable, and more mischievous than this is.*

Perhaps it may be contended, that the universal light of reason, the truth and fitness of things, are of themselves sufficient to exalt the nature, and to regulate the manners of mankind. The philosophers of Greece and Rome, undoubtedly present us with the most convincing proof, how far unenlightened reason can carry her investigations towards the perfection of ethics. The powers of intellect which they displayed, and the obstacles they surmounted in discovering these valuable truths, are I own not equitably estimated, when rigidly viewed through the medium of the Christian revelation. I confess too, that their attainments ought be compared alone with the ignorance of the multitudes that surrounded, and preceded them. Then must they appear, what they indisputably were,

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* Letters to Gibbon.

wonderful efforts of the human mind. There will they become the bright dawn of the intellectual morning, which shone more and more unto the perfect day*. But, how distinctly visible; at the same time, were many of their moral incapacities and defects, even to some among themselves. Aristodemus declared to Socrates, he would willingly worship the gods, whenever their ambassadors descended to inform him what to perform, and what to avoid. The enlightened Socrates himself observed, on contemplating the insufficiency of natural reason to reform the world, that the labors of moralists must be vain and ineffectual, unless the Supreme Being should commission some teacher to instruct mankind. The great Roman orator, also; expressed an ardent wish for the discovery of a new demonstration to prove, that virtue alone was sufficient for happiness. This general dissatisfaction, then, this universal uncertainty; clearly evinces the necessity of a divine revelation, and may be considered as the voice of philosophy complaining of her own deficiencies; and imploring the Supreme Being, to point out the path of duty to her impatient and bewildered followers.

* Kett.

The groundless and mistaken commendation of natural law is, however, eternally and fondly dwelt upon. But, look into the first chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and you will see the extent of its influence over the Gentiles of those days; or if you dislike St. Paul's authority, and the manners of scriptural antiquity, look into the more admired accounts of modern voyages; and examine its influence over the Pagans of our own times; over the sensual inhabitants of Otaheite for instance, over the Cannibals of New Zealand, or the remorseless savages of America. "But, these men are Barbarians." The laws of nature, notwithstanding extends to them. "But, they have misused their reason." They have then the more need of, and would be the more thankful for that revelation, which, with a thoughtless and fastidious self-sufficiency, is deemed useless. But, it may be said, these are not the facts which ought to be taken; that the civilized states of China, Japan, India, and Persia, are those alone which should be referred to. Let them be taken; and with them joined also all the nations which flourished in learning and in arts, before Christianity was ever heard of in the world. Let Egypt, let Greece, let Rome be added; shall we find the ground stronger, or the argument in reality the more valid?

LETTER LXXXVIII.

PHILOSOPHERS incessantly cry out, extricate yourselves from prejudice ; shake off the restraints, religion has imposed upon you ; and wholly, and implicitly, be guided by nature. But, what is this nature ? And what am I to understand by the words natural reason, natural evidence, natural and essential order, moral sense, and internal natural sentiment ? Especially when I look to what the high priest of infidelity himself, Bayle says, in a moment of extreme condescension ? La raison, est une principe de destruction, & non d'edification. Elle n'est propre qu'à former des doutes à droite, & à gauche, pour éterniser les disputes, à faire connoître à l'homme ses ténèbres & son impuissance, & la nécessité d'une autre revelation, qui est celle des ecritures. *

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• Manich.

We have a revelation from nature, we are told; and this natural revelation produces a series of sensitive and intuitive knowledge, from the first principles to the last conclusions. The system of things that are, and the phænomena of nature, are the first principles; and reason, a real divine illumination, leads us from one necessary truth to another, through the whole course of these demonstrations. In all these cases, we know; we do not believe: * they are the tables of the law, which are as it were hung up in the works of God, and are made obvious to the sight of man; that he may keep them constantly in his view, and depart as little as possible, in the midst of so many infirmities, and so many temptations.

God has, indeed, attached remorse to sin, as he has satisfaction to virtue: but the vices and the virtues of one state of society are not synonymous to the virtues and vices of another; and how can it be admitted, that the light of reason shall prescribe every virtue, but that the law of nature, shall tolerate the commission of every vice? In the Christian's mind, indeed, Providence has esta-

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* Bolingbroke.

lished a tribunal, whereby he is to be adjudged. Nor can the gratifications of sense restore that man to ease, who is afflicted with the mental chastisement he has merited. We may hide guilt from the world; we cannot conceal it from ourselves. And hence it is, that in turning over those stories in the annals of mankind, some of which we have already noticed, we experience that enthusiasm, which makes us feel a brotherly affection for the worthy and innocent, who have suffered; while we execrate and loath the most pompous wickedness, in all its glory and success,

There is a sort of genealogy of law, says Bolingbroke, in which nature begets natural law, natural law sociability; sociability union of societies by consent; and this union by consent, the obligation of civil laws. Erroneous opinions, it is true of philosophers, and unreasonable institutes of legislators, are often derived from the principles of nature and may be traced up to them. The fountain, however, whence they flowed, was pure: the stream has grown foul in its course; and no wonder it should, since the channels, through which it has passed, have been infected with human passions, human prejudices, and human ignorance.

This

This is, all meant to be clear. It may be well however, to explain it further. Two points, you will observe, are endeavoured to be established; first, that the rules of our duty, are evident to all men, without instruction; and secondly, that they are sufficiently enforced by nature alone. But, these points, are in my apprehension, far from being so certain as may be imagined. One nation for instance, thinks itself obliged by nature, to provide for and cherish its children with the greatest tenderness. Another thinks it unreasonable to bring up sickly infants, and therefore exposes them as soon as they are born. The people of one country, think it their duty to prolong the lives of their parents with all imaginable affection and indulgence; those of another, put their parents to death, when they are become infirm and decrepid. Numberless contradictory rules also might be added with respect to the most important points of moral duty, not only among particular persons, but between public communities; but these are sufficient to evince, that nature and reason do not, either by self-evident light, or by indisputable deduction, instruct every man how he ought to act, on all occasions, and in all circumstances.

As we generally see men, knowing or ignorant of moral, as well as other sorts of knowledge, allowing for the difference of capacity and application, in proportion to their opportunities; and the pains that have been taken in training them up; so we generally see them, making due allowances for difference of constitution and complexion, affected with greater or less degrees of love for virtue, and aversion to vice; nay we often find some even fond of vice, and averse to virtue; avoiding the one with the utmost distaste, and pursuing the other with the highest relish; and even reflecting on it when over, not with remorse, but with pleasure, according to the lessons that have been given them, the examples they have followed, the company they have kept, and the course of life they have been accustomed to.

To what purpose then is all the labour of instruction; the toilsome turning over of codes and institutes, the two tables of Moses, the twelve tables of the Romans, or the multifarious ordinances of other wise and cultivated nations? The law is eternally written in the heart. All the rules of equity and good laws, that have any where been enacted, or obtained in the world, have been nothing but transcripts and copies produced

produced in open court, and published from that original, which man keepeth alone within him; and which is the test and touchstone of all laws. But, can this law of nature, designed for every one, not be within the reach of every one? Or can that which, above all things, it concerns all men to know, not be knowable by all?

If nature, however, were the only channel, through which God intended to convey the absolutely necessary knowledge of himself, and all human duties, its voice would have been made to speak a little louder, and more intelligibly to all men, and all capacities, than we find it does. It would have been so plain, that there could have been no controversy about it. Hunger, thirst, fear, love, and other natural propensities, are universally strong and evident in the black as in the white, in the Turk as in the Jew. Were religious and moral obligations also notified to us by our Maker, only through the light of nature, they too would by nature, one should think, be universally evident and incontestable. Yet, we find, that the profoundest unassisted men, in all ages, have differed widely about them; and that those who have trusted most to their own abilities, who have rejected traditionary knowledge, and drawn all from within

within themselves, have given the most incongruous schemes of religion and morality.

No law, nor system of laws, can possibly answer the end and purposes of law, until the grand question, what is the chief happiness, and end of man, be determined. Before the promulgation of Christianity, the world was infinitely divided on this important head. The Pythagoreans, the Stoics, Academicians, the Peripatetics, indeed, all agreed, that the *pulchrum* and the *bonestum*, were essential to virtue, being parts of its definition; nor could virtue and morality, in reality have a fairer representation, than by the beautiful in sentiment and action. But were they not miserably bewildered in all their researches after the chief good? Each sect, each division, each subdivision of sect, had a chief good of its own, and rejected all the rest. They advanced, as Varro tells us, no fewer than two hundred and eighty-eight opinions, relative to this matter; which shews by strong experiment, and undeniable evidence, that the light of nature is altogether unable to settle the difficulty.

Reflect again for a moment, on the phenomena of the human mind; we are more affected by

by fancy than by nature. The senses, in their enjoyment being confined, can neither add to, nor take from their objects; while the imagination, being free in the choice of its colors and lineaments, incessantly passes from object to object, selecting that which is most brilliant, and thence forming its phantom. The lineaments thus become collected, or rather concentrated in our imaginations, and acquire force from concentration, as the rays of light collected in the focus of a lens. It is the property however, of fanciful ideas to destroy each other, and to have no continuance without the assistance of novelty. The objects, which tend to the gratification of the senses, are on the contrary extremely confined, when compared to those which are imaginary; for such are ever active, and ever shifting in time, in magnitude, and in appearance.

Thus there have been always at least two sorts of religion, and it would be preposterous to deny it; the first, the religion of nature, which consisting in the eternal, immutable rules and principles of moral truth, reason or righteousness, has been always the same, and must for ever be alike apprehended by the understandings of all mankind, as soon as it comes to be fairly

fairly proposed and considered. The other, the political, hierarchical religion, built upon tradition, history, and human authority, and which has always been different, in different ages and countries; nay in the same age, and country, and church. This has been the case even with the church of Christ, though declaredly of divine foundation. Some make the Messiah, to be God equal to the father, and anathematise those who do not believe this dogma. Others bring him down to mere man, and will not allow him to have had any existence, prior to his nativity or incarnation. Some will have his death to be a proper atonement, or propitiation for the sins of the world; while others explode and condemn a vicarious atonement as absurd, impossible, and contrary to the perfections of God, to the nature of man, and to the necessary reason and moral fitness of things. Some maintain, that there are seven sacraments by divine institution; others affirm that there are only two.

This is all strictly and undeniably fact: and still as we go along, I shall unavoidably have occasion, nor shall I be unwilling to concede whole ranks of imbecility and presumptuous folly, to the disciples, or even to the zealous advocates for the law and the religion of nature. But,
how

how comes it, as a preliminary question let me ask; that the enemies of Christianity, and professedly of all revealed religion, should be so desperately hard run, as to acknowledge, that our Saviour found the whole world in a state of error concerning the first principles even of natural religion, though not in absolute darkness; and that the spreading of Christianity, has been indisputably of infinite advantage to mankind? * Or what are we to say to their confession, that a revelation was to be desired, in order to enlighten what was dark; to give stability to what was fluctuating; to strengthen what was weak; and to make familiar to the commonest understanding, what was but obscurely conjectured by the most profound?

Modern philosophers, I mean modern free-thinkers, are of all reasoners, I must believe, the most inconsequent in theory, and the most extravagant in practice. To construct an edifice conformably to their systems, there is not an actually existing verity, which is not to be destroyed. Every foundation of order, every union established by the agency of religion is to be annihilated. The whole system, of all that is most salutary is to be changed. And why? Merely to make way, as

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I conceive for the discordant effusion, and the chimerical offspring of culpable eccentricity; which would as whimsically, though not altogether as harmoniously arrange a world, as a Butcher or a Buffon, would construct one; the parents of which are consequently to be considered in no better light than as dogmatists of sceptics, with whom reason is all-sufficient, though they at the same time, acknowledge themselves ignorant of every thing.

Can real wisdom and philosophy then entirely consist in doubting of evidence, in combating all received opinions, and in confounding the most obvious dictates of common sense? Is it the right way to teach morality, to trick vice out with allurements? Is it a fact, that to inspire a principle of religion, is to implant bigotry and prejudice? Is it clear, that all establishments, both civil and religious, are iniquitous and pernicious usurpations on the liberties of mankind? Is it the only way to be a good man, to disbelieve the gospel and the scriptures? And is it pure benevolence to mankind, to set them afloat in uncertainty, and make them as uneasy and hopeless as possible? Horace, calls something of this nature, if I recollect right, *insaniens sapientia*.

pituitia. Nay, a late writer, * (which is scarcely to be credited, but he best knows whether his "philosophy, be philosophy run mad,") has made an attempt to revive Paganism; and from a love of the mythology of the ancients, or a peculiar way of thinking, would plunge the Christian world into all the visionary subtleties of the Platonic school.

The innovators, however, who are the most vociferous for a general sweep, and who plead for universal toleration with unbounded liberty, are notwithstanding on all occasions, not only tyrannical, but I may venture to say, absolutely and cruelly despotic. As one instance out of many, (and you will not deny it to be a fair one) observe Rousseau. This man, wayward indeed, and at all times paradoxical, who expressed a contempt for societies, as they are formed; who spurned at kings, princes, ministers, magistrates, philosophers, theologians, universities, colleges, academics, priests, religions, revelations, miracles, prophecies, even at the utility of science altogether; this man, notwithstanding, in the publication of his own speculative principles, had the hardness solemnly to pronounce, "that the citizen who should infringe any one
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* Mr. Taylor.

of the articles conceived by him, Jean Jacques Rousseau, should suffer death." What are we to conclude after this? Tell me seriously, are we silently to sit down as quite overpowered by such infallible authority?

It would be pleasant on all occasions, were it possible, to throw a cloak over the imperfections of men; but these philosophers have in the present case put it wholly out of our power. While they have not the ability to substitute any thing better, in the room of the morality and virtue which spring from religion, neither the names of Voltaire, Diderot, d'Alembert, Helvetius, Bolingbroke, nor Hume, can, or ought to impede the exposition of opinions, arbitrary, baseless, and fallacious. It is a severe charge, but it hath been urged against them, that with rage more than human, they have braved both God and man; defied Hell and laughed at Heaven; and that none ever did more to discourage and distress the virtuous, to confound the weak, to confirm the wicked, and in a word to exalt the body, that they might destroy the soul. The French even called their countrymen, from the inconsiderate and comparative nothingness, and from the paucity of good derived from them to their fellow creatures, *Rienists*.

Does

Does all the reason of human nature, reside in you alone? said Job to the free-thinkers of his day. Does all the reason of human nature, reside in you alone? may we say to the free-thinkers of ours. And shall all the wisdom of the world die with you? But, "ask of the beasts, and they shall teach you; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell you. Speak to the earth, and it shall teach you; and to the fishes of the sea, and they shall declare unto you. In whose hand, is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind? With God is both strength and wisdom. The deceived, and the deceiver are his. He maketh them to grope in the dark, without light; and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man. He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out of light the shadow of death."*

Were we, in truth, entirely committed to the guidance of these self-appointed legislators, what would be our situation? One tells us, the passions are our best sources of information; another, that the passions are the Scylla and the Charybdis of the understanding. This man informs us that they are the parents of genius; that man, that they are the cause of folly: this,

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that

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• Chap. 12.

that they constitute our only happiness, that that they inevitably entail misery. This, in short, that the passions are every thing desirable, that, that they are every thing detestable. Of what consequence to the public is the probity of an individual, says one of them? It is surely of no utility whatever. Let the public consider the living man then, as posterity, will consider the dead man. What matters it, that Juvenal was mischievous; Ovid debauched; Hannibal wicked, Lucretius impious; Horace intemperate; Augustus deceitful; or that Julius Cæsar himself should have been the wife of every patrician at Rome? A man of talents, though he be covered with infamy, is yet of more use, and consequently of more estimation, than the most honest and virtuous citizen of slender or inconspicuous abilities.* The scriptures teach us, says Boulanger, that the fear of God is the commencement of wisdom. I say, on the contrary, that the fear of God, is the commencement of folly.† D'Argens, says, the precepts of Christianity, which recommend forgiveness of injuries, and love to one's enemies, are calculated for no better purpose, than to render men contemptible and cowardly.‡ Conscience, in a bug

Helvetius. † Christian Dévoilé. ‡ Let. Juives.

bear, says another. Moralists deceive us, when they tell us, it is an innate sentiment, a sentiment inseparable from our nature. It is neither more nor less than that natural apprehension every man has, of present punishment, probable shame, or lasting disgrace.* Remorse can be of no use to us, says Lametie, after we have perpetrated the crime. The wicked man, to be certain of his happiness, should spurn at contrition.† Frail beings that ye are, exclaims Mirabaud, why trouble your tranquillity with fanciful and wretched inquietude; why distress yourselves with miserable phantoms, engendered in imagination, or artfully created by impostors.‡

Is all this like philosophers? Is it not rather like men, who would have great estates, without any management; great expences, without any accounts; and great families, without any discipline or oeconomy? But with respect to Christianity, is not Christianity itself, in fact, the religion of nature, so much contended for by philosophers? For the end of Christ's coming was, not to abolish the old and fundamental religion, but to perfect it: he came, not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. Hence the Christian

B b 2 . . . religion

* Moral. Univers. † Œuvres de Lamétie.

‡ Système de la Nature.

religion, in whatever light it be taken, is certainly nothing new, no novel system, no other than the perfection of that religion, originally imparted to mankind?

It is well when any terms are held with Christianity. He who attacks revealed religion only, says Montesquieu, may be in some respects pardoned; but he who attacks natural religion, attacks all the religions in the world. Though men should be taught to disbelieve the obligations of revealed religion, they may still think themselves bound by the religion of nature; but, it is most pernicious to endeavour to persuade them, they are bound by no religion at all. It is not impossible to attack a revealed religion, seeing it depends on particular facts, and facts are, in their own nature, liable to be controverted; but this is not the case with natural religion; for it is drawn from the nature of man, which cannot be disputed; and from the internal sentiments of mankind, which are equally incontrovertible. A man, who is going to be burned, or afraid of being burned, because he does not believe certain articles, whether depending or not depending on revealed religion, hath very good reason to attack it, because he may thereby hope to provide for his own defence. But the case is very different, where

where the man who attacks revealed religion, does it without the least personal motive; and where, if he should succeed, nay should be in the right too, he would only deprive his country of numberless real benefits, for the sake of establishing a merely speculative truth.*

Lively free-thinkers have, at all times, a happy and a convenient knack of arranging their arguments in such a manner, that the truth may be carefully concealed; and then of dancing round their syllogisms as wild Indians dance round their circle. What religion, say they to the Chinese, next to your own, is the best? The religion of nature, says the Chinese. What religion, would you embrace, were you to abjure Mahomedanism? The religion of nature, says the Mussulman. Christians, which is the true religion, if Christianity be not? The religion of nature, which was the religion of the Jews. But, you Jews, what is the true religion, if Judaism be false? Why, certainly, the religion of nature. Thus, to that which is with unanimity allowed the second place, are we not, we are asked, in fairness to give the first?

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But

* Spirit of Laws.

But, as I have often said, one of our principal difficulties, is in rightly comprehending what this nature is. It signifies, first, the collective body of all the beings, which the human mind is capable of knowing: secondly, the universal principle, which forms and governs that collective body; which principle is at the same time, nothing but *God*, represented by the word nature, as he is the principle of life and motion in every thing that affects us by means of our senses: thirdly, the particular and immediate constitution, that makes each being in particular what it is: fourthly, the disposition which is found in all beings, independent entirely of art, and human will: fifthly, in fine, it signifies the idea, we form to ourselves, of what is most immediately inherent in each thing, and which we express by definition; which is termed in the schools metaphysical essence, but which should perhaps be more properly called represented essence.

The religion of the gospel, taking the term nature in the sense most applicable to the subject, is, I acknowledge, the true original religion of nature. Our Saviour came into the world,

as he himself declares, to supply the defects of reason, not to alter the pure sentiments, of which God had ordained his creatures should be possessed. Religion, in this view of it, is the same it was in the days of the old law; the same it was in the days before the law was given; and the same, both then and now, that it will be a thousand years hence, if the world last so long. Such natural religion can only differ from revealed religion, in the manner of its being communicated. The one is the internal, as the other is the external revelation of the same unchangeable will of a Being, who is alike, at all times, infinitely wise and good. There can then, in truth, be no disagreement between them. This many eminent divines have allowed. *O si sic, omnia dixissent!*

But concerning this pure natural religion it may be confidently asserted, that there never was an age, or nation, in the world, in which it was ever practised. Religion, before the introduction of Christianity, and even now in unenlightened countries, exhibits in the most unequivocal manner, the glaring weaknesses of the human understanding; even to the bigotted and horrible extreme, of sacrificing the lives of men to the sanguinary honor of their divinities. Here
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wish I could stop; but I am compelled to the confession of even a more culpable atrocity, in one misguided branch of the very system for which I am contending. To burn bodies, and to sentence souls to everlasting perdition, have been fraudulently tortured out of the words of mercy, and of peace, and have been claimed as a right in sacerdotal prerogative. Say, ye solemn murderers of the holy office, is it not true, that ye dress your wretched victims in a *san benito*, of coat painted with flames and devils, that the deluded populace, may conclude, that those whom you condemn, are immediately and justly precipitated to hell? And that on the scaffold, you ferociously take your leave of each agonising sufferer, with this dreadful expression, *Jam animam tuam tradimus Diabolo?*

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LETTER LXXXIX.

IS there a natural beauty of figures, says Shaftesbury, and is there not as natural a beauty of actions? No sooner does the eye open upon figures, or the ear to sounds, than the beautiful results, and grace and harmony, are known and acknowledged. No sooner are actions viewed; no sooner are the human affections and passions discerned, (and they are most of them as soon discerned as felt) than immediately an inward eye distinguishes the fair and shapely, the amiable and admirable part, from the deformed, the foul, the odious, and the despicable. How is it possible, therefore, not to own that, as these distinctions have their foundations in nature, the discernment itself is natural, and from nature alone?

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But, where is this exemplified? In what system of even the wisest of the philosophers? We cannot meet with it in the works of Plato or Cicero; or in those of the emperor Antoninus, or of the moral Epictetus. The most animated consideration of the *honour*, and the *honestum*, of the beauty of virtue, and the fitness of things, are not able to furnish even a Brutus himself with permanent principles of action; much less, are they able to purify the polluted recesses of a vitiated heart; to curb the irregularity of appetite; or to restrain the impetuosity of passion in common men. If you desire me to examine the works of Grotius, or Puffendorf, of Burlamaqui, or Hutchinson, for what you understand by the law of nature; I apprehend you are in a greater error, in taking your notions of natural law, as discovered by natural reason, from the elegant systems of it, which have been drawn up by Christian philosophers; since they have all laid their foundations, either tacitly or expressly, upon a principle derived from revelation; the thorough knowledge of the being and attributes of God. And even those, who rejecting Christianity, still continue deists, are indebted to revelation, (whether they be either aware, or disposed to acknowledge the debt or not), for those sublime speculations concerning the Deity, which

which they have fondly attributed to the excellency of their own unassisted reason.*

By the gospel were supplied the deficiencies of all proceeding institutions and systems. The maxims of Christian wisdom, were not only refined and enlarged, but established upon a true principle, and made conducive to an exalted end. To complete, likewise, the benevolent plan of revelation, the same volume, which is filled with the most pure lessons of wisdom, contains the most perfect exemplification of them. Christ, condescended to recommend his instruction, by his own practice. The Divine teacher, not only spoke as man never spoke, but acted so as to combine the efficacy of example with the perfection of precept, became the unerring guide to all that was pious, all that was amiable, and all that was great.

Believe me then, the nature of Christianity is quite misapprehended, when it is confounded with the abuses with which it has been overwhelmed. It is from these abuses that men have been led into a state similar to that mentioned by Plutarch, in his Treatise of Superstition, of persons

• Bishop Watson.

sens; who flying from superstition, leaped over religion, and sunk into downright Atheism. Christianity, indeed, is not a religion very palatable to a voluptuous age; it will not conform its precepts to the standard of fashion; it will not lessen the deformity of vice by lenient appellations, but, calls breaches of morality by the names by which they ought to be distinguished; it will not pardon the lusts, it will not license the intemperance of mankind; nor can it be otherwise than a troublesome monitor to a man of pleasure.

What if there should be some incomprehensible doctrines in the Christian religion; some circumstances, which in their causes, or their consequences, surpass the reach of human reason; is it to be rejected upon that account? Let those who are, or would be thought men of reading, of knowledge, and of enlarged understandings, weigh the matter fairly; and consider, whether revealed religion be not, in this respect, just upon the same footing, with every other object of their contemplation. Even in mathematics, the science of demonstration itself, though they get over its first principles, and learn to digest the idea of a point without parts, a line without breadth, and a surface without thickness;

thickness; yet they will find themselves at a loss to comprehend the perpetual approximation of lines which can never meet; the doctrine of incommensurables, and of an infinity of infinities, each infinitely greater, or infinitely less, not only than any finite quantity, but than each other. In physics, they cannot comprehend the primary cause of any thing; not of the light, by which they see; nor of the elasticity of the air, by which they hear; nor of the fire, by which they are warmed. In physiology, they cannot tell what first gave motion to the heart; nor what continues it; nor why its motion is less voluntary than that of the lungs; nor why they are able to move their arm to the right or left, by a simple volition: they cannot explain the cause of animal heat; nor comprehend the principle by which their bodies were at first formed, nor by which they are sustained, nor by which they will be reduced to earth. In natural religion, they cannot comprehend the eternity or omnipresence of the Deity; nor easily understand how his prescience can be consistent with their freedom, or his immutability with his government of moral agents; nor why he did not make all his creatures equally perfect; nor why he did not create them sooner: in short, they cannot look into any branch of knowledge, but they

they will meet with subjects, above the human comprehension.*

The fall, and the redemption of human-kind, are not more incomprehensible, than the creation and the conservation of the universe; in both, the Infinite Author of the works of Providence, and of nature, is equally inexplicable, equally past our finding out. And it is somewhat remarkable, that the deepest inquirers into nature have ever thought with most reverence, and spoken with most diffidence, concerning those things which in revealed religion may seem hard to be understood; they have ever avoided that self-sufficiency, which springs from ignorance, produces indifference, and ends in infidelity. Admirable to this purpose, is the reflection of the greatest mathematician of the present age, when he is combating an opinion of Newton by an hypothesis of his own still less defensible, than that which he opposes:—*Tous les jours que je vois de ces esprits-forts, qui critiquent les vérités de notre religion, et s'en moquent même avec la plus impertinente suffisance, je pense, chetifs mortels! combien des choses sur lesquelles vous raisonnez si légèrement, sont-elles*

• Bishop Watson.

elles plus abîmées, et plus élevées, que celles sur lesquelles le grand Newton s'égare si grossièrement.*

Voltaire, and others, have embraced every opportunity of contrasting the persecuting temper of the Christians, with the mild tolerance of the ancient Heathens; and I will gratefully acknowledge, I never read a page of theirs upon the subject, without thinking Christianity materially, if not intentionally obliged to them, for their endeavours to suppress the haughty spirit of religious bigotry; earnestly desirous as I am that every species of intolerance may be rendered universally detestable.† But, I wish, for the credit of human nature, I could find reason to agree with them, in what they have, with so much good-natured pleasure, said of the universal toleration of Polytheism; of the mild indifference of antiquity; of the Roman princes beholding, without concern, a thousand forms of religion subsisting in peace under their gentle sway.‡

Livy tells us, in express terms, that the prohibiting all foreign religions, and the abolishing every mode of sacrifice which differed from the Roman

* Euler.

† Bishop Watson.

‡ Gibbon.

Roman mode, was a business frequently entrusted by their ancestors to the care of the proper magistrates: and he gives this reason for the procedure; that nothing could contribute more effectually to the ruin of religion, than the sacrificing after a foreign rite, and not after the manner instituted by their fathers.* In Flon Cassius, we meet with a great courtier, one of the interior cabinet, and a polished statesman, in a set speech upon the most momentous subject, expressing himself to the Emperor, in a manner agreeable enough to the practice of antiquity, but utterly inconsistent with the most remote idea of religious toleration. The speech alluded to, contains, I confess, nothing more than the advice of an individual; but, it ought to be remembered, that *that* individual was Maecenas; that the advice was given to Augustus; and that the occasion of giving it, was no less important, than the settling the form of the Roman government. He recommends it to Augustus to worship the gods himself according to the established form; and to *force* all others to do the same; and to *bate* and *punish* all those who should attempt to introduce foreign religions: nay, he bids him in the same place, have an eye upon

* Lib. 39.

† Dion. Cas. L. 32.

upon the philosophers; as that free-thinking, free-speaking at least upon religious matters, was not, by the way, given so safe even under the gentle sway of the Roman princes, as, thank God, it is under the much more gentle government of Christianity.

Christianity, it is certain, was for a long while, exposed to the relentless rage of the most cruel tyrants, that ever contaminated the annals of history. We have adventured to them, in some instances already. But, in the endeavor to palliate the severity of the Romans towards the Christians, it has been found necessary to remark, that it was in vain, the oppressed deliverer asserted the inalienable rights of conscience and private judgment; for though his situation might excite the pity, his arguments could never reach the understanding, either of the philosophic, or of the believing part of the Pagan world.* How is this? Are the arguments for liberty of conscience so exceedingly inconclusive, that they are incapable of reaching the understanding even of philosophers? A suspicious adversary, says Bishop Watson to Mr. Gibbon, would embrace with avidity the opportunity

this passage affords him, of blotting your character with the odious stain of being a persecutor; a stain, which no learning can wipe out, which no genius or ability can render amiable.

So far, I repeat it, were the ancients from being tolerant, that when we contemplate the perilous situation of the Christians of the first ages of the church, "When," as Tacitus expresses it, "the day was not sufficient for their tortures, the flames in which they perished, served to illuminate the night;" we have abundant reason to pour forth the most ardent expressions of gratitude to Heaven, that we live in times, when the profession of Christianity, neither involves us in personal danger, nor subjects our property to confiscation, nor our families to infamy and indigence. We stand on the peaceful shore, and view in the remote prospect of ancient days, the storms which agitated the primitive converts upon the sea of persecution. In gloomy retrospect we can trace, what we happily cannot feel, the authority of the magistrate, and the turbulence of the multitude; leagued against Christianity, in the most formidable confederacy.

This view of our subject, in fact, presents to us an idea of the Christian religion, equal to the
greatest

greatest and most magnificent conception of the human mind. The noblest people that ever entered upon the stage of the world, appear to have been only instruments in the Divine hand, for the execution of wise purposes concealed from themselves. The Roman ambition and bravery, notwithstanding their persecutions, paved the way, and prepared the world for the reception of the Christian doctrine. They fought and conquered, that it might triumph with greater ease. By means of their victories, the overruling wisdom of God established an empire, that really possesses the perpetuity and eternal duration, which they vainly arrogated to their own.

It is painful to remark, the quick vicissitude, and the invincible obstinacy of intolerance and persecution. Adrian intended to destroy Christianity altogether, as well as to extirpate Judaism. Marcus Antoninus considered and treated the Christians as mad and presumptuous enthusiasts; and speaking of a wise man's readiness to die, he says, he should be prepared, that his readiness might be seen to be the effect of a well weighed judgment, not of mere obstinacy, like that of the Christians.* Most of the Christian Apo-

C c 20. logists,

• Lib. 11.

pagans, in consequence, lament their singularly hard fortune, that when other people were accused for things, the Christians were accused merely for a name; and that which was, in other cases, in itself quite indifferent, was with them a capital offence. All that was required, say they, was simply to prove the name, without cognizance being taken of the crime.* Pliny, though a polite scholar, and no enthusiast in religion, yet conceived that the pertinaciousness of Christians, in refusing to concur with the national worship, was an offence deserving punishment. His master Trajan was of a similar way of thinking, though his directions were guarded with a simulance of toleration. And hence the justice of Tertullian's invective against this prince: "If you condemn, why not enquire? If you do not enquire, why not absolve."†

Religious liberty, says Bayle, constituted, it must be confessed, no avowed part of the system of Paganism, how artfully soever its cause may have been defended by the wit and ingenuity of its modern advocates.‡ Even Mr. Gibbon reluctantly allows, that the Christians and Jews were an important exception to the general ideas of

* Tertullian.

† Jortin.

‡ Pensées Diverses.

of toleration. Nay, the apathy of Hume itself is constrained to acknowledge, that a national superstition, which could delude so great a man as Livy, could not but impose on the generality of the people. * It cannot then be denied, that both Christians and Jews were treated as despicable, stubborn, and even wicked enthusiasts, whose pettular cement and union in a body, was falsely represented and punished, as a detestation of the rest of mankind: "Odio humani generis conjuncti." †

The persecutions of the Christians were not, indeed, constant; they were at considerable intervals. Had it been otherwise, and the extermination of the Christian religion, been a constant measure of government; and had many emperors been as much in earnest as Decius, Dioclesian, and Julian; the history of the decline and fall of the Roman empire would now be still more indelibly stained than it is with the blood of the thousands, who were sacrificed to intolerance. In the reign of Nero, however, is placed the first persecution; the second, as it is commonly called, was under Domitian, who at the same time expelled learning and phi-

C c 3

losophy

* Nat. Hist. of Religions.

† Tacitus.

losophy from Rome and Italy.* Under Verus, when earthquakes, inundations, and famine, afflicted different provinces, and when these dreadful and not uncommon calamities were ascribed to the impieties of the Christians alone, a violent persecution was raised against them; and the enraged populace were appeased and gratified by the destruction of numberless victims.† But, I will not disgust you with a further enumeration. When sentence of death was pronounced against Cyprian, it ran in these words: "That he was the enemy of the Gods of Rome, and the ring-leader of a criminal association."

Compulsion at all times, eventually defeats its own purpose, and either forces the object of its resentment to wear the temporary mask of hypocrisy, or excites that restless and determined resistance of the will, which no force can subdue. To soothe the mind into compliance by the gentle arts of persuasion, and to allure it by the flattering prospect of advantage, is easy and practicable; but to restrain its inclinations by violence, or to implant opinions repugnant to its judgment, is not less impossible, than to arrest the flight of lightning, or to imprint a durable mark upon the surface of the ocean. †

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* Suetonius.

† Gibbon.

‡ Kert.

In all this struggle likewise, it is remarkable that we have no example of any Heathen philosophers pleading in favour of toleration, or expressing any compassion for the sufferings of Christians. On the contrary, even Marcus Aurelius, who holds a high rank among philosophers, as well as among emperors, bore the most implacable hatred to Christians, and rejoiced in every event that was unfavourable to them. And this probably, because the doctrines of Christianity were level to the plainest capacity; and because, according to such doctrines, all mankind without distinction of high or low, rich or poor, were equally candidates for a happy immortality; and in this great respect, compared to which all other distinctions are of no moment, the meanest slaves became equal to their masters. Before such a system as this, the boasted superiority of philosophers must have vanished. Hence, their pride became mortified, and they saw themselves, and the science to which they pretended, eclipsed by the illiterate among the common people, upon whom they looked down with contempt. The philosophy of Aurelius, and of Julian, did not emancipate their minds from the most absurd superstition and prejudice; nor dispose them to humanity, with respect to men, who

entertained opinions different from theirs, though they were in reality guilty of no offences against society or the state.*

If the Tiber overflowed; if the Nile did not inundate the parched countries of Egypt; if an earthquake shook the ground; if a scarcity threatened any of the provinces; if a contagious distemper broke out in any part of the empire, that is in any part of the then known world; the wretched Christians were immediately sought for and sacrificed, that the gods might be propitious. *Christiani ad Leonem*, was the invariable cry, on the arrival, and during the continuance of any calamity.† Husbands, wives, and children, after being made to endure cruel scourgings, and all kinds of torture, dreadful even to mention, were either thrown into the fire or drowned. Some were cast to wild beasts: others were obliged to massacre each other. Some were famished to death; others crucified: some had their flesh torn with sharp instruments till they died; others were put to death, by having their limbs torn asunder by branches of trees. Some, had the joints and sinews of their feet destroyed by fire; others, their eyes dug out and

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* Priestley.

† Tertullian.

and the sockets burst with hot irons. But the means, by which they were destroyed, and the number of the proscribed, are not to be enumerated. We read of an inscription in honour of Nero, for having extirpated Christianity in Spain. Two inscriptions have also been discovered, which ascribe the same success to Diocletian, Maximian, and Galerius, expressing, that "the name of the Christians, who had overturned the state, was extinguished."†

That we have not further testimonies, is not surprising. Obscure sectaries of upright morals, when they separate themselves from the religion of their country, do not speedily acquire the attention of men of letters. The historians are apprehensive of depreciating the dignity of their learned labours, and contaminating their splendid narration of illustrious events, by mixing with it a disgusting detail of religious combinations; and the philosophers are usually too deeply engaged in abstract science, or in exploring the infinite intricacy of natural appearances, to busy themselves with what they, perhaps hastily, esteem popular superstitions. "It is therefore no just ground either of surprize or concern, that

* Eusebius.

† Lardner.

that Tacitus and the younger Pliny should have spoken so slightly of the Christian system; and that Seneca and the elder Pliny should not have vouchsafed to mention it at all."^a

Historians and philosophers, of no mean reputation, might be mentioned, I believe, who were contemporaries of Luther and the first reformers; and who have passed over in negligent or contemptuous silence, their daring and unpopular attempts to shake the stability of St. Peter's chair. Opposition to the religion of a people must become general, before it can deserve the notice of the civil magistrate: and till then, it will be commonly thought below the animadversion of distinguished writers. This remark is peculiarly applicable to the case before us. The first Christians, as Christ had foretold, were *bated of all men, for his name's sake*; it was the name itself, not any vices adhering to the name, which Pliny punished; and they were every where held in the utmost contempt, till their numbers excited the apprehension of the ruling powers. The philosophers considered them as enthusiasts, and neglected them; the priests opposed them as innovators, and calumniated them;

^a Gibbon.

them; the great overlooked them; the learned despised them; and the curious alone, who examined into the foundation of their faith, believed them.*

But, this surprise and this concern, indirectly imply, or I am greatly mistaken, a doubt concerning both the evidence of the principles upon which Christianity was built, and the supernatural power by which it was supported. Every man certainly has a right to doubt. The right of private judgment, in every concern respecting God and ourselves, is superior to the controul of human authority. Reason is the only faculty we possess, whereby to judge concerning any thing. It is like the exclusive individual faculty of seeing with one's own eyes, or hearing with one's own ears. But, from one who denies the Divinity, if not the excellence of the Christian doctrine, let me ask, upon what ground it is, he ventures to conclude, that the whole common course of nature is carried on according to general pre-ordained laws, with which he is intimately acquainted? We know, undoubtedly, several of the general laws of matter; and a great part of the natural dispositions of living agents, is reducible

* Bishop Watson.

ducible to general laws. But, we know, in a manner nothing of the first principles of existence, or of death; much less of those intellectual phenomena, which rush into our minds, as it would seem, by accident, although every reasonable man is certainly assured, there cannot, in reality, be any such thing as chance.

The scheme of our present existence is, I conceive, infinitely more wonderful, and much more beyond our thought and conception, than revelation. The constitution of the world, and God's most awful government of it, are surely all a mystery. We have nothing to help our conception of the relative characters of God, as our ruler and preserver. These things then, though they are very plain, are very incomprehensible. They are plain, as to their reality; they are incomprehensible, as to their manner.

But, my reason, says a free-thinker, cannot reconcile itself to the divinity of Christianity; and reason ever did, and ever will govern rational creatures in every thing they determine, whether it be speculative or practical. True, it is not a matter of option with men, whether they shall use their reason; it is a matter of necessity; it is as impossible that it should be otherwise, as
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that a man should think, without thinking upon something; or that there should be material existence, without taking up space.

The question is not therefore, whether reason is to be followed, but whether every man's reason must needs guide him by its *own light*, or must cease to guide him, as soon as it guides him by a light borrowed from revelation? This is at least, as I conceive it, the true state of the question; not whether reason is to be our guide, but how it may be made our safest guide. And on this ground it is unbelievers are opposed, not because they reason, but because they reason ill. Fancies cannot be admitted as demonstrations. The case is similar to that of dissolute men, who differ from the virtuous, not in their desire of happiness, but in their manner of seeking it.

It is as freely to be granted that a law, or light of reason is common to men, as that love and hatred, feeling and sensation, are common to men; it is granting no more, than that men are by nature intelligent and rational beings. But, the bulk of mankind, are as different in reason, as they are different in visage. Nay, we ourselves afford most palpable instances of reason frequently, almost daily, differing from *first*,

first, setting up one opinion, then setting up another. So that when we speak of human reason or a reason common to mankind, we speak of as various, uncertain, and unmeasurable a thing, as when we speak of a love, a liking, an aversion, a good-nature, or an ill-nature, common to mankind; for these qualities admit of no variation, uncertainty, or mutability, but such as they directly receive from the reason of mankind. The temper and passions of a child differ only from the temper and passions of a man, as the reason of the child differs from the reason of the man.*

It is not flattery, that compliments vice in authority; it is not corruption that makes men prostitute their honour; it is not sensuality, that plunges men into debauchery; it is not avarice, that makes men sordid; it is not ambition, that makes men restless; it is not venality, that makes men sell their consciences; it is not interest, that makes men guilty of falsehood, fraud, and perjury. What is it then? Why is it reason, the use of human reason, that does all this. To suppose that reason permits itself to be governed by passions, or tempers, but is not the immediate agent of all that is done by them, is as absurd, as

* Nature, Extent and Provinces of Human Reason

to suppose that reason permits itself to be governed by the hand, when it is writing falsely; or by the tongue, when it is talking profanely; but is not the immediate, direct agent of all that is written and spoken by them.

Reason is then either the best or the worst faculty we have: as it is certainly the only principle of virtue, so it is as certainly, the sole cause of all that is base, horrid, and shameful, in human nature. As it alone can discover truth, so it alone leads us into the grossest errors. Was it not reason, that made Medea kill her children; that made Cato kill himself; that made Pagans offer human sacrifices to idols; that made Epicurus deny a Providence; that has made some men sceptics, others bigots; some enthusiasts, others sacrilegious; that made Hobbes assert all religion to be human invention; and Spinoza, to declare trees, and stones, and animals to be parts of God; that makes free-thinkers deny the freedom of the will, and fatalists exhort only to a reformation of manners?*

No particular man, let his endowments be what they may, can in reality be a better judge of the rectitude of his own reason, than he is of the rectitude of his own self-love; the sagacity of his own understanding,

* Ibid.

understanding, the brightness of his own parts, the justness of his own eloquence, or the depth of his own judgment. For there is nothing to deceive him in self-love, in the opinion of his own merit, wit, judgment, and eloquence, but what has the same power to deceive him in his opinion of his own reason. And if it be the fate of most sects to be fondest of their least beautiful offspring, none seem so inevitably exposed to this fatality, as those whose religion is to have no form, but such as it receives from their own passions.

What shall we say then to the free-thinkers assumed infallibility? To their humble pretensions of having their understanding irradiated with the beams of immutable eternal reason; and of having an unerring mark and criterion of essential truth, in which men cannot be mistaken? The eternal and invariable rule of right and wrong, is the wholesome guide to the solid ground of peace and safety.* Deism is bright as the heavenly light, and free from all ambiguities; it makes all men happy, who embrace it; and it perfectly satisfies all doubts, and procures the troubled soul unshaken rest.† My scheme, says Tindal, tends to the honour of God, and
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* Chubb. † Resurrection of Jesus considered.

the happiness of human societies ; there are none who wish well to mankind, but must also wish this hypothesis to be true. Reason, says another of the same school, is my only rule ; and the displaying of truth, my only aim. My design is to recover the dignity of virtue, and to promote that veneration for wisdom and truth, which have been destroyed by faith. Even Hume asserts the merit of throwing light upon the most curious and sublime subjects, with regard to which, all the received systems had been extremely defective, and which had escaped the most elaborate scrutiny and examination. He proposes to reconcile profound inquiry with clearness, and truth with novelty ; and to undermine the foundations of an abstruse philosophy, which seemed to have served hitherto only as a shelter to superstition, and a cover to absurdity and error.* “Nay, says he, I flatter myself I have discovered an argument, which will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently, will be useful as long as the world endures.”

It is lamentable to see such waste of deep erudition, of splendid sentiments, ingenious arguments, and brilliant language. Can it be, that these

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* Philosophical Essays.

very able and eloquent expounders of philosophy should have forgotten, that although every man be the judge, according to the light of his own reason, yet this very reason has little in it which he can call his own? We derive even natural knowledge, as it is called, from others. We get it in the same manner as we do language, customs, and modes of behaviour. Very little more is our own, than a capacity to be instructed, a nature fitted for impressions; as capable of vice as of virtue; as ready to be made a vicious animal, as a religious rational creature; as liable to be made a Hottentot, by being born among Hottentots, as to be made a Christian, by being born among Christians.

Our moral and religious knowledge, therefore, is not to be imputed to the internal light of our own reason and nature; but to the happiness of being born among reasonable beings, who have made a sense of religion and morality as natural to their minds, as refinement of language to their tongues. I do not mean to say, that there is not a good and an evil, a right and a wrong, founded in the nature of things; or that morality is dependent upon the opinions or customs of men; but, only to shew, that we find out this right
or

or this wrong, and come to a sense of this good and this evil, not by any inward strength or light that nature of itself affords, but by such external means, as those by which people are taught civility, urbanity, politeness, or any other rules of cultivated life. Men do not prefer virtue to vice, from a philosophical view of the fitness of the one, and the unfitness of the other, founded in the nature of things; but because it is a judgment as early in their minds, as their knowledge of the words virtue and vice.

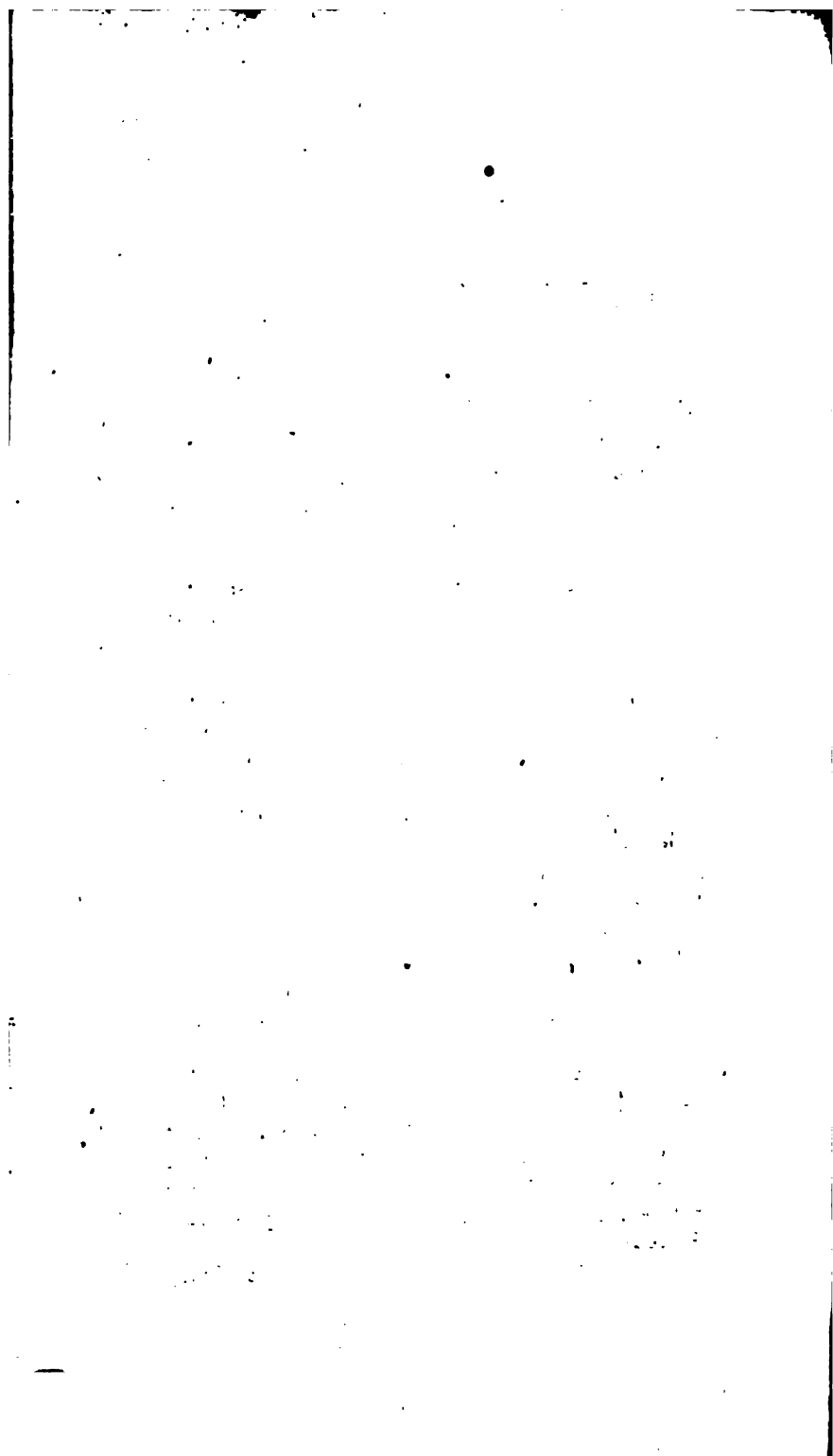
Now, if our light be little more than the opinions and customs of those among whom we live, and if it be so hard for a man to arrive at greater wisdom, than the common wisdom of the place or country which gave him birth and education, how absurd is it to appeal to the perfection and sufficiency of our own reason, against the possibility and advantage of divine revelation! If we be scarcely any thing, without the assistance of men, shall we think ourselves too wise, and too full of our own light, to be farther enlightened with knowledge and wisdom, from the Creator himself? Who ever proved, that there is in mankind a natural instinct of mutual regard, sufficient to engage every one to love his neighbour as him-

self, and to do unto all others, as he would wish others should do unto him? *

It is utterly impossible for mere reason to comprehend the reasonableness and fitness of every thing. For instance, look at the reason of things, and the fitness of actions, and tell me how they moved God to create mankind, in the state in which we are? Can any mysteries of revelation so entirely exceed the comprehension of man, as the state of man himself? Shew me according to what fitness, founded in the nature of things, God's infinite wisdom was determined to form you in such a manner, and bring you into such a world, as the present, and support and preserve you in it? While, therefore, your own form, while creation and Providence are depths which you cannot fathom, is it not arrogant to assert, that God cannot reveal any thing, except your own reason can shew its foundation in the nature and reason of things? Is it not as unfit for God to create man in such a state, subject to such a course of Providence as you cannot prove to be founded in the fitness and reasonableness of things, as to reveal to him such truths, or methods of conduct and belief, as you cannot by any arguments of your own prove

* Nat. Extent, and Prov. of Human Reason.

prove to be necessary? Is it reasonable and fit, there should be no secrets or mysteries in Providence, but that man should be so perfectly master of its plan, as to be able to prove all its steps to be constantly fit and reasonable? The great judge of the world has, for the wisest purposes, thought proper to interpose, between the weak eye of human reason and the throne of his eternal Providence, a degree of obscurity and darkness, which, happily for the former, protect it from an immensity of objects, so little fitted to its comprehension. We ungratefully refuse to acknowledge the wisdom and rectitude of Divine Providence, unless we can explain the reasonableness of all its operations; though, at the same time, they could not possibly be right, unless they were as much above our comprehension, as our wisdom is below that which is infinite.



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